

RECONNECTING THE FIBERS OF OUR LIVES: THE USE OF THE CREATIVE
SPIRIT OF GOD FOR HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION

By

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Abstract

RECONNECTING THE FABRICS OF OUR LIVES: HEALING THROUGH THE CREATIVE SPIRIT USING INTERPRETIVE QUILTING

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African-American women who live in urban communities that are poorly served by government services and suffer from the impact of systematic racism, sexism and classism (compounded with increased violence, substance abuse, inadequate healthcare and nutrition; compounded by dysfunction within the family and other issues) experience tremendous amounts of stress. This condition, if it persists from childhood into adulthood results in Cumulative Lifetime Stress, which eventually leads to mental and physical disease. This project explores elevation of stress with a group of African-American women in the East New York section of Brooklyn, an underserved community. It utilizes the gathering of women, in conversation with a variety of issues that can cause one to live in a constant state of anxiety. The participants in this project over a period of eight weeks took issues from within their lifetime and used them to redirect their negative impact into positive ones by refocusing the manner in which they viewed them through an interpretive quilt and biblical engagement.

Dedicated to my mother, Betty Jean Jones who instilled in me that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me; my brother, the late Kenneth M. Jones who inspired me to always create; my father, the late William Hightower Jones, who encouraged me to reach beyond my limits because God sets higher goals for us in life; my children, Jada Iman, Shamel Naquan, and Jovan Christine who cheered me on through trials and tribulations; and the spirits of all of my ancestors whose lives have inspired me, I give thanks and praise to God for you all.

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Preface

Life is like a patchwork quilt – we take pieces of our lives that become worn and torn and cut them up to try and patch them up and make them into something new and/or useful. Sometimes we take them and throw them in the closet of our subconscious mind. But over time, we tend to pack so much in the closet that when we open the door it all comes falling out. We break down under the pressure of the sadness, anger, despair and stress that comes pouring out.

We can either push them back into the closet or throw them out, losing a piece of ourselves in the process. Or we can face them, trim away the frayed edges, and piece them creatively back together, forming a new pattern and design in our lives . . . like a quilt.

This demonstration project focuses on reshaping and using the fabrics that make up our lives to learn to identify and creatively face these issues through the art of interpretive quilting. It is approached in the same manner used when making a quilt from conception to completion. I take bits and pieces of information and activities and join them together to create one whole unit. This is why most of the chapters are entitled as actual steps in producing a quilt.

This is a journey about healing the mind, body and soul. It is about learning a different way of approaching life's problems. It is about "Reconnecting the Fabrics of our Lives."

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE FOUNDATIONAL FABRICS OF THE PROJECT

The Foundation Fabric of the Vision

As a single African American mother trying to survive in urban America today, I have resided in the East Brooklyn area for the past 25 years. During that time, I have worked as a community health nurse for about 20 years specifically in service to this area. During my years of serving this community through various community health agencies, I discovered that many of the women who were assigned to me suffered from a tremendous amount of stress. The majority of them were suffering from hypertension, obesity, cardiovascular disease and the physical deterioration from substance abuse. Many of these women were single parents, welfare recipients, living below the poverty level in public or Section 8 housing. Some were survivors of domestic or intimate partner violence, recovering addicts, had significant others who were incarcerated, and the list of traumatic experiences could go on. Overall, what they all had in common was the experience of stress caused by the trauma of living in an urban area. According to Leslie Crofford, “Genetic susceptibility and lifetime environmental exposures play a role in creating vulnerability to disease” resulting in “Cumulative Lifetime Stress.”¹

“By virtue of our very creation,” as stated by Christian Koontz in *Connecting Creativity and Spirituality*,

¹ Leslie J. Crofford, “Violence, Stress, and Somatic Syndromes,” *Trauma* 8, no. 3 (July 2007): 299-313, <http://tva.sagepub.com/content/8/3/229> (accessed October 7, 2014).

We each have within us the divine energy and sense of direction we need to co-operate with God in creating ourselves and in adding to the richness, diversity, and beauty of the universe. If we could but believe this truth and act upon it, the kingdom of peace and love would become a reality even in our time.²

Imagine if each person were able to tap into their divine energy in communities where people have had a history of feeling the impact of marginalization from the upper echelons of this society. True political, community and church leaders may be instrumental in advocating and rallying the community for change. However, what will the community look like if the residents are able to envision a solution to their problems and advocate those changes for themselves? Even better, once the individual taps into that creative spirit, she joins with other women who have also tapped into their creativity, they begin a dialog, a sharing of ideas on how to effect change within their homes and community.

This demonstration project uses the process of creating an art quilt as a means not only to bring forth this divine spirit of creativity buried within each participant, but also to provide an opportunity for women to gather together in fellowship with the teachings of Jesus Christ. By journeying through this creative process—which in fact is really a journey back through their individual histories—issues that cause women of color to become torn inside will be faced, and the torn pieces will be reconnected into a new creation.

This demonstration project will examine three major areas as it relates to developing a plan of action, or healing modality that can be used as a tool to impact the problem of Cumulative Lifetime stress. Three areas will be addressed by this project:

² Christian Koontz, *Connecting Creativity and Spirituality* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1986), 5.

- The psychosocial question will ask: *What is Cumulative Lifetime Stress and its impact among African-American women in urban settings?*
- The historical perspective will establish: *How has quilting among African American women been used as a creative outlet to benefit the individual quilter and the community as well?*
- Biblical engagement will address Women's issues through an exegetical analysis of Acts 9:36-42, answering the questions: *How can the story of Tabitha inspire and resurrect women going through issues within their own lives? How does her story empower, resurrect, and breathe new life in women who are facing the challenges of urban life in America?*

I have chosen to use quilting as the artistic medium not only because I am a master quilter but also because it is a part of African American Heritage. During slavery, quilts, as passed down from the oral tradition of enslaved Africans, contained secret encoded messages in different patchwork designs. These quilts hung outside the Underground Railroad supporters' homes that signaled a safe haven for them. According to Floyd Coleman, in his foreword to *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*, "enslaved Africans and their descendants were not hapless individuals, but ones who remembered or were taught their past, and through the materials available began to reconstruct themselves in the United States, a new and very restricted environment."³ It becomes evident that there was a link between the art of quilt making and the struggle for freedom.

³ Floyd Coleman, "The Importance of the Decorative Arts in African American History," in *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999) 5-6.

Our struggle for freedom continues today, with the struggle to free ourselves from internalized oppression which causes people of color living in the margins of this society to merely maintain or exist. With the emerging of the Spirit of creativity, there comes a release from the shackles of the imagination that breathes new life into dead or dying hopes.

The Foundation Fabric of the Site Location

St. Paul Community Baptist Church is located in the East New York section of Brooklyn New York. Some consider it the “Heart and Soul of East New York” because it is the largest congregations in the area that directly serves the Eastern Brooklyn communities and beyond, priding itself on being an agent of change.⁴

The Ministry at St. Paul Community Baptist Church has eight ministries that are directly involved with providing Christian education and witness, support, care and service to the members of the congregation. They are The Jewel (Women’s) Ministry, the Eldad-Medad Men’s Medallion Ministry (which Black Men who Quilt falls under), Team Q (youth ministry), Baby Dedication (also known as Honoring the Spirit of Shippah and Purah), Congregational Care, which includes Health and Wellness, Bereavement, Cancer Support, Wounded Healers (for issues of addiction), Recovery Coaches and Prayer Intercessors, New Life Ministry (Discipleship), the Deaf Ministry, Daytime Ministry, and the Sacred Arts Ministry, which is comprised of the choir (Voices of St. Paul), Praise team, Voices of Hope (youth choir), Jewel Dancers (for the women), Eldad-Medad Dancers (for the men) and Movement in Hope (for the children).⁵ The women previously

⁴ St. Paul Community Baptist Church Overview, <http://spcbc.com/overview> (accessed February 12, 2014).

⁵ St. Paul Community Baptist Church Ministries, <http://www.spcbc.com/ministries> (accessed February 12, 2014).

had a quilting group at the church, The MAAFA quilters, which was began under Dr. Youngblood as a tool for healing. It disbanded in 2010 due to many of the quilters leaving the church and lack of interest by women in the congregation. Four members of the group remained at the church but due to other commitments were unable to continue and maintain the group. However, they still continue to quilt with other guilds or on an individual basis.

St. Paul Community Baptist Church has a history of promoting culture, creativity and social justice. The mission of the church is actively involved in programs to build affordable housing (Nehemiah Project) and improve the condition of public housing, advocating for the immediate repairs of deplorable conditions that previously went unaddressed by HPD. The church is a principal member in Metro IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation), which is spearheading this problem. Metro IAF, in conjunction with the church, hosted several forums and mayoral debates addressing this problem and several other concerns of people within the city of New York, such as discrimination by NYPD with “Stop and Frisk,” and violence and gun control in marginalized communities.

The church had maintained its own private school to provide quality education to the children in the community. In the past four years it has been converted to an all-boys charter school, partly due to economic reasons in order for the school to remain viable and partly due to the lead pastor’s vision that young boys need to be educated in an environment that specifically meets their needs.

During the summer, the church has a “Freedom School” for the children in the community. Through a reading program and field trips, they learn more about their

history and culture. The program provides nutritious meals for the children in addition to employment opportunities for young adults as counselors and junior counselors.

Recently, the pastor went to Germany with other area pastors to address gun manufacturers about controlling the sale of guns in our communities. Although real progress is yet to be made in this endeavor, the manufacturers at least know that the people are angry and want to hold these manufacturers accountable for the irresponsible sales of their products.

One of our greatest experiences of God, our relationship to God as a people and connection to the spirituality of our ancestors is the Commemoration of the Maafa (the Great Tragedy). This high holy week for the church, celebrated the third week in September, remembers those souls that were lost during the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade as well as those who survived the devastation of enslavement in the Americas. Speakers come from around the world to educate the congregation on a range of topics, such as our heritage, the world we live in, and facts. A psycho-drama is presented during this time in which the philosophy of Sankofa is recognized: to go back and get it, or as the Pastor Emeritus, Rev. Dr. Johnny Ray Youngblood stated, “the way out is back through.”

Throughout the year the congregation is engaged in Spirit-charged worship services. On Sundays there are three services and on Wednesday there is a Noon Day One Hour Watch and a 7:00 pm ‘People in Prayer Service’. Revival is held twice a year, during Vespers or Holy Week and again at Spring Revival.

It is difficult for me to explain how the members experience God in their daily lives because there is a divide in the congregation. When I first became active in the ministry at St. Paul, we were taught morning meditation, prayer and anointing to prepare

ourselves spiritually. We honored the ancestors who came before us, the highest ancestor being Jesus Christ. We maintained a strong spiritual bond to our history and culture.

Now, we have more new members who are coming from the surrounding community that do not possess a strong historical and cultural understanding of our African roots. Many of them are experiencing church for the first time and are trying to grasp an understanding of Jesus and find how to develop a relationship with him.

Although our tradition and denomination is Baptist, we do not have deacons, but elders like in the AME church. We have kneelers like in the Catholic Church. We serve communion on second Sundays, Wednesdays and anytime the pastor feels it is needed.

Fiber content of the Church Theology

The theology of St. Paul is a bit complex. It is a combination of Black Liberation, Conservative, and Traditional African theology. I feel Pastor Brawley is on the path to develop a new spin on theology, a Theology of Advocacy. Between his work with Metro IAF and leading the push to hold gun manufacturers accountable for the sale of their weapons, he is advocating for the community in which the church physically exists. The ministry is not just concerned with meeting the needs of the congregation, but also the community in which it sits. Some of the people in the East New York and Brownsville sections of Brooklyn have probably never set foot in St. Paul; yet the effects of the ministry and call to action by the pastor, inspired by God, positively impact their lives in a positive manner. Community-based programs, such as The Gideon Project, which advocated for the successful and long overdue repairs of resident apartments in public housing, has brought many residents in the community into the church. Pastor Brawley is affectionately referred to as the “Pastor of the Projects.”

The Fiber Content of the Congregation and Community Demographics

St. Paul is located in Community District 5 which encompasses East New York, Highland Park, New Lots, Spring Creek, and Starrett City. The population in 2010 was 182,896. Out of this number, 51.2% receive some form of public assistance. Over 75% of the housing units in this area are multiple family dwellings. Median income is \$26,503.00. Roughly 28.9% of families live below the poverty level, with 41% of these from single parent households.⁶ The congregation at St. Paul numbers about 3000, with 20% men, 65% women and 15% youth under 19 years of age.⁷

The future continues to look bright for the St. Paul Community Baptist Church. They are currently responsible for the construction of an 84-unit senior housing project in East New York. They continue to be on the forefront of political actions that fight for improvement in the quality of life in the community. The pastor wants to develop training and mentoring programs to new ministers. He is also looking to open an all-girls charter school and community center.

The church is now in a state of transition, as the Lead Pastor establishes his Call from God as under shepherd of the community. The congregation has become comfortable with his leadership and has grown to love and respect him in his role, as the marriage between pastor and his people becomes solidified. He continues to teach and encourage the congregation to take on leadership and responsibility for the church and community. One of his goals for 2015 is the restoration of the health and wellness of the congregation. Programs that will improve the overall mental, physical and spiritual health

⁶ Community Data Brooklyn District 5, http://www.nyc.gov/html/neighborhoodinfo/bk05_info.shtml, (accessed March 29, 2014).

⁷ St. Paul Community Baptist Church History, <http://SBCBC.com/church history> (accessed March 1, 2014).

of the congregation are being incorporated into the church's curriculum, making a demonstration project of this nature timely and applicable. With such vision and calling, whatever the future holds for St. Paul will be momentous.

The Foundation Fabric of the Issue

Urban life comes with urban stress. The Eastern Brooklyn area is home to three of the most poverty-stricken, predominately African American communities: East New York, with a poverty rate of 36%; Bedford-Stuyvesant with a rate of 30.7%; and Brownsville with the highest rate of 39.8%.⁸ The majority of those living in poverty are women. Single female headed households compose almost 46.3% of households in East New York and 53.4% of those in Brownsville, compared to only 26.4% of households in the New York Metropolitan area.⁹

Women, who find themselves in the traumatic situations of urban life, whether due to circumstances of abandonment, domestic violence, substance abuse, or the like, sometimes suffer from issues of low self-esteem and/or other psychological states.

According to bell hooks, in *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self-esteem*:

Most discussions of black people and self-esteem start by identifying racism as the sole culprit. Certainly the politics of race and racism impinge on our capacity as black folk to create self-love rooted in healthy self-esteem, sometimes in an absolute and brutal manner. Yet many of us create healthy self-esteem in a world where white supremacy and racism remain the norm. Clearly being victims of racism does not imply that we cannot resist in ways that are an expression of healthy self-esteem. When we study the psychohistory of African Americans it becomes apparent that the foundations of the shaky self-esteem that assaults our sensibilities is rooted in the experience of traumatic violence. Whether it is the emotional violence caused by the pain of abandonment or the violence that is a consequence of domination (whether racism, sexism, or class elitism), it is

⁸ Crofford, "Violence, Stress."

⁹ Ibid.

the normalization of violence in our lives as black people that created the foundation for ongoing trauma reenactment.¹⁰

The triple jeopardy of racism, sexism, and class elitism, can impinge upon our capacity as a people to create self-love rooted in healthy self-esteem.¹¹ The constant and consistent stress of urban living and adaptation to that stress play crucial roles in health. Cumulative lifetime stress has been associated with a number of physiologic changes that have been linked to a group of disorders.¹² It can be contended that dis-ease with one's life can over time manifest itself as disease in the body. We can and must rise above the stressors caused by the various "isms" in order to live fruitful and fulfilling lives.

Studies have shown that African American women residing in the United States have higher rates of hypertension than do their Caucasian counterparts.¹³ The American Heart Association in 2005 reported that approximately 45% of African American women, age 20 and older, have hypertension. In comparison, about 30% of White women have high blood pressure. Often these findings are attributed to lifestyle or hereditary traits. However, alterations in sodium/potassium ratios, genetics, cardiovascular reactivity, body weight, hormonal systems, and stress experienced by African Americans are continually exposed to stressors associated with living in a Westernized culture. Stressors for African Americans may include exposure to racism, poor housing, poor education,

¹⁰ bell hooks, *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self-esteem* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2003), 21.

¹¹ S. Rosenfield, "Triple Jeopardy: Mental health at the Intersection of Gender, Race, and Class," Abstract, PubMed.gov, US National Library of Medicine National Institute of Health, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22326306>.

¹² Crofford, "Violence, Stress."

¹³ Mary Webb, Jason Beckstead, Janet Meininger and Sabrina Robinson, "Stress Management for African American Women with Elevated Blood Pressure: A Pilot Study," *Biological Research for Nursing* 7 (Jan 2006): 187-196, <http://brn.sagepub.com/content/7/3/187> (accessed June 11, 2015).

unemployment, low-status occupations, high rates of poverty, and stressful residential environments.¹⁴

Lives for residents in the urban black community come with many stresses. Studies have shown that this stress builds up within an individual over time and can lead to what is known as Cumulative Lifetime Stress Disorder. Over time, if the stress is persistent or unresolved within the psyche of the individual it can cause physiological as well psychological problems ranging from depression to obesity. Eventually this disease becomes actual disease. Studies have shown that while genetic susceptibility is a factor in disease manifestation, environmental exposures to stressors also impact upon vulnerability to diseases.¹⁵ These stressors have remained within our community since the Great Migration of African Americans from the south to the urban industrial areas in the north. “The suburbanization and the ghettos that were created as a result of the limits of where [African-Americans] could live in the North [still exist today].”¹⁶

Although the opportunity for employment in the industrial areas increased the earning potential of African Americans, problems such as overcrowding resulted in urban ghettos. Further compounded by the rise and fall of the economy since the Great Depression of 1929, more African Americans migrated to northern cities in hopes of achieving the American Dream. Because of his sympathy towards the plight of African Americans, President Franklin Roosevelt instituted governmental programs to assist in raising awareness of their struggle and aide them in assimilation not only to the urban

¹⁴ Ibid., 187.

¹⁵ Crofford, “Violence, Stress, 299-313.

¹⁶ Terry Gross, “The Great Migration: The African American Exodus North,” *Author Interviews*, July 15, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=129827444> (accessed November 21, 2015).

cities but to the dominate culture as well.¹⁷ With this came new opportunities for African Americans to rise to new levels of success. As success entered their lives, bringing them closer to *the dream*, negative issues of the dominant culture began to rear their ugly head: “Racism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance. Sexism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance...Heterosexism. Elitism. Classism.”¹⁸

Many Blacks, especially women, first began to feel the impact of racism in the home. As the family became more assimilated, so did the desire to achieve the aesthetic appearance of white women. For many, skin color and hair texture were the deciding factors for determining beauty and success.¹⁹

Growing up in Detroit, Michigan and having two parents who were considered middle class successes, I understand the impact of this on a young woman’s psyche. Light skinned with “good hair” was desirable. To be dark skinned with the coarse, coil – like texture of our hair was frowned upon. We would bleach our skin and burn out our hair with pressing combs and relaxers to achieve the look that was dictated as beauty by white America. Thinner bodies as opposed to our thicker, big-boned, hearty physiques caused us to starve ourselves thin in hopes of having a twenty-four inch waistline. Preferential treatment was given to the girls in school who had features that were closer to Caucasians. Knowing that I was not ever going to fit into that image—although I did manage to starve myself into a size five in high school—was the beginning of my stress

¹⁷ “Issues of Race in the 1930s,” University of Virginia, accessed November 21, 2015, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug02/NewYorker/Race.html>.

¹⁸ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 115.

¹⁹ bell hooks, *Salvation: Black People and Love* (New York: William Morrow, 2001), 56.

and rebellion. By 10th grade, I cut off all of my hair and wore a short afro and threw out all of the bleaching products I owned.

In their research, “African Americans’ Mental Health and Perceptions of Racist Discrimination: The Moderating Effects of Racial Socialization Experiences and Self-Esteem,” Ann R. Fischer and Christina M. Shaw contend that “[o]ne frequently hypothesized influence on African Americans’ mental health is the perception of racist discrimination.”²⁰ Thus one would instantly conclude that racism can be an underlying cause of depression in the African American community. However, they admit that there is lack of empirical research to substantiate it.

One reason for the lack of empirical research on racism and mental health involves the ethics of studying racist discrimination. We assume racist discrimination to be negative and unfair by definition; thus, experimentally manipulating individuals’ receipt of racism is out of the question. Perhaps an even more basic issue involves judgment of what constitutes racist discrimination. Although there may be clear-cut instances of individual behavior that definitely are or are not racist, a great many behaviors exist that one person might judge racist whereas another might not. Even if manipulating racist discrimination were ethical, however, identifying the racist–nonracist manipulation itself would be problematic. An indirect approach that may begin to shed light on African Americans’ experiences with racist discrimination—and that sidesteps both of the above issues—is to assess perceptions of racist discrimination people already have experienced in their everyday lives. The data of perceptions are not ideal (i.e., they are shaped by a variety of affective and cognitive factors), but they do provide a starting point in studying the possible link between racism and mental health. We would like to state unequivocally that research on perceived racist discrimination should not be used to make inferences about actual racist discrimination. Thus, even if no relation were found between perceived discrimination and mental health in a given study, it would not necessarily mean that racist discrimination does no harm to African Americans’ mental health.²¹ Researchers cannot test that possibility directly.

²⁰ A. R. Fischer, and C. M. Shaw, “African Americans’ Mental Health and Perceptions of Racist Discrimination: The Moderating Effects of Racial Socialization Experiences and Self-Esteem,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 46, no. 3 (1999): 395-407. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.46.3.395.

²¹ Ibid.

They concluded in their study that positive racial and social identity within the family and awareness of the issues of racism were indicators of effective mental ability to cope with racial discrimination in this society and higher self-esteem.²² What is amazing is that they do not look at how systemic racism, which seems so subtle to the dominant white culture, has a blaring impact on Black Americans.

Violence perpetuated against African Americans resulting from racist attitudes from slavery until today continues to increase stress levels within our communities, if only hearing of the latest attack or death of Black men and women in the news is evidence. Black women live in a state of fear of the death of their mates and children at the hands of racist Whites or angry Blacks. Scholar, theologian, and activist Cornell West states in the preface of his book, *Race Matters*:

Black people in the United States differ from all other modern people owing to the unprecedented levels of unregulated and unrestrained violence directed at them. No other people have been taught systematically to hate themselves – psychic violence – for the primary purpose of controlling their minds and exploiting their labor for nearly four hundred years. The unique combination of American terrorism – Jim Crow and lynching – as well as American barbarism – slave trade and slave labor – bears witness to the distinctive American assault on black humanity. This vicious ideology and practice of white supremacy has left its indelible mark on all spheres of American life – from the prevailing crimes of Amerindian reservations to the discriminatory realities against Spanish-speaking Latinos to racial stereotypes against Asians. Yet the fundamental litmus test for American democracy – its economy, government, criminal justice system, education, mass media, and culture – remains: how broad and intense are the arbitrary powers used and deployed against black people. In this sense, the problem of the twenty-first century remains the problem of the color line.²³

²² Ibid.,

²³ Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xii-xiv.

No matter how much of the American pie that Blacks have been able to obtain in business, politics, sports and education, evidence of racism still persists with “racial profiling, drug convictions (black people consume 12 percent of illegal drugs in America yet suffer nearly 70 percent of its convictions!), and death row executions.”²⁴

When you add the isms of gender and class into the equation, you find African American women at the bottom of the pay scale. Black and Puerto Rican women experience a double disadvantage: women and members of a minority group. As compared with whites, gender inequality among other minority groups is relatively small.²⁵ This shows that there is a feminization of poverty in the United States, with special ramifications for women who are female heads of households.

Sexism took its root in African Americans upon touching the shores of the Americas. Willie Lynch a British slave owner in the West Indies in 1712 gave a speech that detailed how slave holders would be able to control enslaved Africans. In one section of his diabolical pontification he details how to gain control of the African female and her offspring:

Take the female and run a series of tests on her to see if she will submit to your desires willingly. Test her in every way, because she is the most important factor for good economics. If she shows any sign of resistance in submitting completely to your will, do not hesitate to use the bull whip on her to extract that last bit of resistance out of her. Take care not to kill her, for in doing so, you spoil good economics. When in complete submission, she will train her off springs in the early years to submit to labor when they become of age.

²⁴ Ibid., xv.

²⁵ Yuval Elmelech and Hsien-Hen Lu, “Race, Ethnicity, and the Gender-Poverty Gap” (Bard College; The Levy Economics Institute; and the Center for the Study of Wealth and Inequality, Columbia University and The National Center for Children in Poverty and Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, 2001), 1, <http://www.levyinstitute.org/pubs/wp351.pdf> (accessed November 22, 2015).

Understanding is the best thing. Therefore, we shall go deeper into this area of the subject matter concerning what we have produced here in this breaking process of the female nigger. We have reversed the relationship in her natural uncivilized state she would have a strong dependency on the uncivilized nigger male, and she would have a limited protective tendency toward her independent male offspring and would raise male off springs to be dependent like her. Nature had provided for this type of balance.

We reversed nature by burning and pulling a civilized nigger apart and bull whipping the other to the point of death, all in her presence. By her being left alone, unprotected, with the male image destroyed, the ordeal caused her to move from her psychological dependent state to a frozen independent state. In this frozen psychological state of independence, she will raise her male and female offspring in reversed roles.

For fear of the young males life she will psychologically train him to be mentally weak and dependent, but physically strong. Because she has become psychologically independent, she will train her female off springs to be psychological independent... nigger females being without influence of the nigger male image, frozen with an independent psychology, will raise their offspring into reverse positions. The one with the female offspring will teach her to be like herself, independent and negotiable (we negotiate with her, through her, by her, we negotiate her at will). The one with the nigger male offspring, she being frozen with a subconscious fear for his life, will raise him to be mentally dependent and weak, but physically strong, in other words, body over mind. Now in a few years when these two offspring's become fertile for early reproduction we will mate and breed them and continue the cycle. That is good, sound, and long range comprehensive planning... Our experts warned us about the possibility of this phenomenon occurring, for they say that the mind has a strong drive to correct and re-correct itself over a period of time if they can touch some substantial original historical base, and they advised us that the best way to deal with the phenomenon is to shave off the brute's mental history and create a multiplicity of phenomena of illusions, so that each illusion will twirl in its own orbit, something similar to floating balls in a vacuum.²⁶

This plan was meant to be an effective means to control enslaved Africans and their offspring for hundreds and even thousands of years. 69.5 percent of all births in 2005 occurred outside of marriage. "Black children are significantly less likely than other

²⁶ Willie Lynch, "The Willie Lynch Letter: The Making of a Slave!
http://www.archive.org/stream/WillieLynchLetter1712/the_willie_lynch_letter_the_making_of_a_slave_1712_djvu.txt (accessed November 22, 2015).

children to be living with two married parents. In 2006, 35 percent of black children were living with two parents, compared with 84 percent of Asian children, 76 percent of non-Hispanic white children, and 66 percent of Hispanic children.”²⁷

During the struggle against Jim Crow and the fight for Civil Rights, Black women put their own liberation in the background as we supported our men in the struggle for justice and equality. With the success of the Civil Rights Movement and further assimilation into the white American Dream, the nightmare of sexism in the African American community is able to continue and flourish. Putting our desires for equality on the back burner, black women were to assume the role of the doting housewife: not only serving as the primary care giver of her home, but also acquiring employment outside of the home in order to maintain the dream. This compounded her level of stress by doubling the expected workload. Though the ideal situation would be a sharing of domestic responsibilities in the home between husband and wife, the reality is that a woman is still expected to get home, cook, clean, care for children and her mate before she can lay down for the night. One reason is the expectation that the male is the provider for the home and this is his primary function, while the woman is still responsible for the care of the home, whether she is working full-time hours or not. In the case of the female headed household, this is to be done on a single salary which may or may not be sufficient. More stress.

It is quite evident that racism and sexism and the stress that comes with them have historical and systemic roots in America. When you look at the stressors that follow African American women from their past and add them to their present stressors and

²⁷ Unmarried Equality, “Statistics,” Unmarried Equality, <http://www.unmarried.org/statistics/#raceðnicity> (accessed November 22, 2015).

what they perceive will be stressors waiting for them in their future, it can be said that things will get worse, however resilient a black woman's nature. We learn to make a way out of no way. We have everything we need to correct the stressful situations in our lives. All it takes is going within and finding the Spirit to create a new reality for oneself.

It is my contention that in order for women to change their circumstances, they must first envision a better one. This requires use of the imagination: what will you do different? How will you do it? What will be the steps you will take and why? How does this new vision make you feel? When we tap into our creative imaginations, mysteries unfold, miracles happen. You can do the impossible! It requires faith, courage, trusting relationships and most of all love.

Love for your family, love for your neighbor, but most of all love for yourself. It is my proposition that when women in similar situations, under similar circumstances come together, a bond forms from which they create different ways and means to endure their hardships. This "requires the courage to invest one's self over a period of time in a relationship that will demand an increasing openness."²⁸

²⁸ Rollo May, *The Courage to Create* (New York: Norton, 1975), 17.

CHAPTER 2: THE QUILT CHALLENGE

The Circle of Wisdom Sistahs

After completion of the proposal for the project, I met with my advisory team. I prayed hard and long on who would be selected to advise me on this project. They must be people that I trusted and respected; individuals that understood theology, Womanist Theology, research, psychology and the art of African American Quilting. The team originally consisted of five members but Rev. Dr. Timothy Harris, the only male on my team, was called to pastor his own church.²⁹ Minister Nicole Duncan-Smith was added to the Advisory Team during the final year of the project. She is my sister minister at St. Paul Community Baptist Church as well as my seminarian sister at New York Theological Seminary. She graduated from the Master of Divinity Program in 2014. She holds a degree in Sociology from Spellman College and is a very talented writer.

The reference to the Advisory team as Wisdom Sistahs comes from my credo entitled *Sistahology: A Healing Journey of Sisterhood and Faith*. Within the context of Sistahology, God provides for the replacement of the need for relationships and guidance by way of Wisdom Sistahs. “These women are mother and sister-like individuals within the community who come to call you out of your mess, give comfort and direction for

²⁹ Rev. Dr. Timothy Harris was originally on the team. He was my supervisor in Supervised Ministry while I was interning in my final year of the Master of Divinity program. He encouraged me to write and publish my work and to continue my academic studies. He relocated to Grand Rapids, Michigan in 2014 after he was called to pastor a church in that area.

survival in this world, but also prepare a sistah to fulfill her divine purpose for the Kingdom of God.”³⁰

The first person I approached to join the group of Wisdom Sistahs was Dr. Rita Strickland, a Ph.D. in Nursing, and a master quilter and healer whom I highly respect. She is a member of St. Paul Community Baptist Church and in all honesty is one of the reasons I was drawn to the church. Her ability to organize and present workshops on various subjects from breast cancer to quilting is astounding. She is well prepared and organized with whatever she presents. She is articulate and knowledgeable on all of the subjects that are to be covered in this demonstration project. She received her Certificate in Ministry from New York Theological Seminary in 2013. A survivor of a heart transplant and breast cancer, she truly understands the healing properties of the Creative Spirit of God. Her quilts have been exhibited nationwide.

The second, Wisdom Sistah is Dr. Angela Moses, a licensed clinician. She holds a Doctorate in counseling and is founder of the Family Life Development Center and the Angela Moses Consultant Enterprise. At the time of my advisor selection, she was a minister at St. Paul’s but has since then left the church. I selected her for her “shoot from the hip” style of psychotherapy. She has a deep understanding of Black women and the way in which we think or shall I say feel. She is really a Pentecostal preacher and has a fiery style of preaching. Though she is not a Womanist, she has a thorough understanding of Theology and Womanist issues. She admits that St Paul’s brand of theology is new to her. The church as she knows it only focused on Gifts of the Spirit (wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, discernment, tongues, and interpretation of

³⁰ Pamela D. Jones, “Sistahology: A Healing Journey of Sisterhood and Faith,” (Master’s credo, New York Theological Seminary, 2013), 17.

tongues).³¹ She stated she had never looked at art work in any form other than preaching, singing and playing of musical instruments as a gift of the Spirit. However 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 states: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone is the same God at work.” These verses come just before the list of Spiritual gifts and are often overlooked when we think about all that the Spirit gives to us. The beauty of St. Paul is that it is emphasized that any gift or talent that you are blessed with is for the glory of God.

The third, Minister Shirlene “Imani-Faith” Holman, M.Div., RN. “Faith” is a graduate of New York Theological Seminary’s Masters of Divinity program Class of 2014. She is the first women to be licensed as a minister at Bethany Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York. She also works as a school health nurse for the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in New York. A powerful proclaimer of the Word, Faith is teaching a women’s Bible study at Serendipity II, a women’s shelter in Brooklyn, New York. She is currently working on becoming a certified Chaplin for the State of New York.

The fourth, Carla Gittens, a member of St. Paul Community Baptist Church and very active in the Women’s (Jewel) Ministry. She has a deep love and desire to help women in any way she can. She does not always understand it, but she has a God-given gift for proclaiming the Gospel at any given moment. I first heard her “preach” while we

³¹ 1 Corinthians 12:7- , “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit...”

were at a women's retreat waiting for the bus to take us back home. The bus was four hours late and the women were getting disgruntled. The next thing I knew, Carla broke out with a full blown sermon. She received her Certificate in Ministry from New York Theological Seminary in 2015. Her preaching style is laid back but Spirit felt. She is currently pursuing her Master's in Pastoral Care and Counseling at New York Theological Seminary.

Finally, Dawn Ammons is a Research Analyst for the City of New York who received her Bachelor of Science in Management Information Systems from Pace University in 1982. Her specialty is research and data analysis. She has been very instrumental in assisting me with finding resources for this project. She is interested in the healing arts and has been a caretaker for many family members and friends. Currently, she is working on a Bachelor of Science in Occupational Studies and plans to pursue her license in massage therapy. She has received biblical instruction from her mother, a lay leader in ministry in the United Methodist Church.

The first meeting was held at Carla's house to review the draft proposal for approval and elicit suggestions on how to proceed with the project. Dr. Strickland pointed out that quilting was prevalent in the works of various authors. The Sistahs agreed that I should use selections from African American Women's literature because their stories, though fictional, were our stories. In *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-recovery*, bell hooks, social and Black Feminist activist points out that

Reading fictional narratives where black female characters break through silences to speak the truth of their lives, to give testimony, has helped

individual black women take the risk to openly share painful experiences.”³²

The review of literature did reveal the significance of quilting in the lives of African American women, and although today’s modern Black women do not take the time to sit and quilt, there is a growing body of work regarding specific quilting guilds and literature for African Americans.

The origins of this project came from my credo, “Sistahology: A Healing Journey of Sisterhood and Faith,” which I developed out of my own hermeneutical perspective and life experiences. It was the final project required for completion of my Master of Divinity degree at New York Theological seminary. It is the theological belief system and study of God from the perspective and restoration of broken women. We gain strength, love, support and healing of our woman-ness through the power of God. It follows the redemptive teachings of Jesus Christ, delivering us from our oppressed states of mind, the healing of our pain and the forgiveness of our source(s) of oppression as well as ourselves. When we are able to forgive and take responsibility for our own lives and surroundings, there is a liberation and freedom of our minds and bodies to the understanding God provides for us in abundance. No matter what our circumstances may be that caused our hearts and spirits to become broken, we are able to move on and live life anew, loving our sisters, our families, our community and ourselves. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can creatively rebuild our lives and reshape the world around us to the beauty and abundance God intends for us to have.³³

³² bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-recovery* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 16.

³³ Jones, “Sistahology, 7.

After completion of my credo, I wanted to develop a plan of implantation for others to follow. Sistahology works primarily through the fellowship of women. Historically in the struggle, African American women have referred to one another as sisters. The origins of the term Sistah comes from two sources. First, Rastafarians pronounce the final syllable of the word sister as *tah* rather than *ter*, placing a strong emphasis on the *tah* ending. Second, AH stands for *Anno Hegirae*, the beginning of first year of the emigration of Muhammad and his followers to the city of Medina in 622 A.D. thus marking the first year of the Islamic calendar.³⁴ Sistahology came to me in the first semester of my theological studies, thus too, marked my journey in time to understanding and development of my studies (-ology) in my understanding of my faith and belief in God.

Carla suggested the identification of “the color of your pain,” since the starting point of the class was going to be “In the Beginning God Created...” What was the origin of your pain? What color can you identify with when you begin to unfold your story? This would involve background fabric selection.

The background in applique and story quilting, which is my mastery, is the foundation fabric on which your quilt is designed. Selection of the right color is key to the particular technique of art quilting that I do. Light colors give the impression of daytime and happiness, while darker colors imply nighttime, sadness or secrecy. The color that is selected sets the mood or background for the story of the quilter. Whenever I am given a vision for a quilt, I spend a considerable amount of time searching for the precise background color for the scene that I am creating. Because I relate the color blue

³⁴ John W. Sweeley, *Women in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Their Roles, Status, Dignity, and Equality* (Middletown, DE: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 193-194.

to my joy and pain, I will often purchase a large quantity of it. Lately, however the color blue does not always project the desired mood so I often use various dying techniques to achieve the right foundation for the vision.

Out of our meetings came conversations about our differences in background but similarities in experiences. Coming from different experiences and walks in life, one thing was for sure: we all had been called by God to heal. Another discovery of the meeting which was a consensus of the group was that the gathering and conversation was cathartic. It was the rediscovery of a part of Black womanhood as it pertains to gathering and discussing what we have lost over the years living in the urban setting. Gone are the days when we came together at the kitchen table in the morning to sip coffee and have good conversation; laughing and crying together. Healing was to be the primary focus of the project but it was not only about healing through quilting, but healing through the gathering of women coming together to share in our stories and conversations; thus, the decision for the workshop to be called *Conversations at Tabitha's Table*.

The proposal was agreed upon by the advisory team with some changes for the strategies for implementation and evaluation. The next phase of the project would be the plan of implementation.

As I sat among my advisors for this project a flash of joy shot through my soul. What God had given to me to give to God's people with the power of the Holy Spirit was about to take shape and grow.

CHAPTER 3

CREATING THE DESIGN

This project was designed to accomplish three goals:

1. To raise the awareness of the women at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church to Cumulative Lifetime Stress among African-American women living in urban areas and its effects on the mind, body, and spirit.
2. Develop a team of at least seven but no more than ten Sistahs that will help develop an interpretive quilting model and curriculum for the quilting circle that will be used as a healing process. Each Sistah would be assigned to lead the circle discussion on preselected topics and be referred to as “Our Tabitha for Today.”
3. Development and implementation of the interpretive quilting model that will promote self-awareness and healing.

In preparation for this project, in January 2014, I attended the American Baptist Churches/USA Orientation for Seminarians and New Ministers, in Orlando, Florida. I had the opportunity to sit down and discuss my project vision with Rev. Dr. Molly T. Marshall, Professor of Theology and Spiritual Formation at Central Baptist Theological Seminary, and author of *Joining the Dance: a Theology of the Spirit*. We discussed the Holy Spirit as the force that causes us to be creative. It is the hand of God that will draw

us into a new life. The Spirit renews us. In her book she uses the metaphor of the dance or Perichoresis to depict

A relationship of mutuality in which persons draw their identity from being related to others. It is an ecstatic dance in which the Trinitarian persons literally “stand outside themselves” as they evoke the life of their divine counterparts. It is movement, an interplay of self-giving that calls forth reciprocal sharing of life.³⁵

This adds strength to the process of using the quilting circle as a means of healing. The gathering of the Sistahs, being in relationship with one another, sharing their stories can bring about healing and a new outlook on life. African-American women do not have to silently suffer the impact of Cumulative Lifetime Stress alone. In the Perichoresis with the Spirit and union with others who join the circle, they can envision a new life, a new reality.

During the five days spent at the conference, I was constantly asked by theologians, pastors, and other seminarians about my project. It forced me to speak the program and its proposed design into existence. I left the conference with a plethora of notes, websites, and books to help me along my task.

In June of 2014 I attended the Institute for Healing of Memories in Pasadena, California. “The Institute for the Healing of Memories seeks to contribute to the healing journey of individuals, communities and nations.”³⁶ The founder, Father Michael Lapsley grounds the work of the Institute in the belief that “we are all in need of healing, because of what we have done, what we have failed to do, and what has been done to us.”³⁷

³⁵ Molly Truman Marshall, *Joining the Dance: A Theology of the Spirit* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 7.

³⁶ Institute for Healing of Memories, <http://www.healingm-memories.org> (accessed Jan 13, 2016).

³⁷ Ibid.

Father Lapsley, an Anglican Priest, worked in South Africa during the years of apartheid to put an end to that racist establishment. On the day Nelson Mandela was released from prison, a package containing a bomb was sent to his home and upon opening it; it exploded, causing him severe hearing loss and the amputation of both of his hands.

Since the 1990s, we have facilitated workshops that enable people from different ethnic groups, races and religions to reach a better understanding of themselves and each other. In a safe, supportive space, guided by expert facilitators, participants are helped to confront sources of alienation, misunderstanding and personal suffering.

The workshop has grown out of South Africa's unique history and our need to remain attentive to how our divided past can impact on us both individually and as communities and a nation. We believe that when personal stories are heard and acknowledged, individuals feel healed and empowered. Through deep listening and meaningful sharing, human relationships can be transformed and restored³⁸.

During the three day workshop, he utilized art therapy as a means to explore areas in each participant's life that needed reflexion and healing. Participants were instructed to draw their life's journey from as far back as they could remember in thirty minutes. Then, we broke off into groups of six and each person was given forty-five minutes to tell their life's journey. During the telling of the journey, the facilitator would ask at certain points how the particular situation in your life made you feel. What was the emotion behind the event? Was there resolution, if so what was it? If not, why? It tied emotions to events and directed you to issues in your life that still needed to be addressed.

There were three white women and three African-American women in my group. It is interesting that all three white women had emotional issues that dealt with sexism within their family history, while all three of us African-American women had issues of racism, classism, and sexism.

³⁸ Ibid.

June of 2014, our cohort for the Doctor of Ministry attended the Hampton University Ministers Conference in Hampton, Virginia. The conference was jam packed with superb preaching and teachings from the top ministers throughout the country. However, it was Reverend Doctor James Forbes' lecture on healing that impacted me most. He stated' "Sickness is a reflection of something messing with God's creation . . . When we are sick; we are marred vessels wanting to be healed."³⁹ The African-American women have a desire to be made whole. However, because the impact of a lifetime of stress has built up to the point that it has become the norm for them, they do not realize that there is anything physically, mentally, or spiritually wrong with them.

During his third lecture, Doctor Forbes pointed out that "the goal for each preacher is to view themselves as a healer . . . we are healers through the power of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁰ So if the Holy Spirit gives us the power to create, it also gives us the power to heal. If we can create a different outlook on our lives, we can heal.

³⁹ James Forbes, "The Condition" (Lecture, Hampton University Ministers Conference, June 4, 2014).

⁴⁰ James Forbes, "The Preacher as Healer," (Lecture, Hampton University Ministers Conference, June 5, 2015).

CHAPTER 4

DRAWING UP THE PATTERN

The methodology, or in quilter's terminology, the drawing up of the pattern to achieve these goals would be accomplished through a combination of lectures, surveys, ethnographic and archival research, interviews and discussions, and hands on training.

Raising Awareness

The first goal was to raise the awareness of the congregation to Cumulative Lifetime Stress among African-American women living in urban areas and its effects on the mind, body and spirit. As the Servant Leader for the Health and Wellness Team at St. Paul's, this was easily accomplished in series of announcements by the pastor regarding the upcoming project and an informational session at the Jewel Summit and Jewel collective meetings.

The Jewel Summit is held on the first Saturday of every third month. The strategy was to introduce the topic during the March 8, 2015 Jewel Summit that consisted of various workshops on women's issues. I presented a lecture entitled, "Honoring Our Bodies as the Temple of God." The Scripture selected to introduce the topic was 1 Corinthians 6:18- 20 (NKJV):

Flee immorality. Every other sin that a human commits is outside the body, but the immoral human sins against her own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you have been brought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

The goal of the material presented was to raise the consciousness of the women's understanding that although we have lived under stressors that are fundamentally caused by racism, classism and sexism, we can choose life. We can de-stress ourselves, (see Appendix B). A brief question and answer session was held afterwards regarding Black women's health issues. The concept of Conversations at Tabitha's Table was introduced as a means for women to gather, discuss their issues, relax and quilt. The plan was to start the program in April, but due to the busy schedule of the church and no space available, it had to be postponed until further notice. The women were informed that there would be an announcement as to the exact date the program would start and all those interested could call and leave a message on my voice mail at the church.

It was pointed out by Irene McWilliams, former coordinator for Health and Wellness at St. Paul's that many women do not like to discuss their health. The survey may have caused them to think about their problems and they either may not have been comfortable revealing them—although it was anonymous—or they may not have wanted to face these problems within themselves.

Overall, however, the lecture that ran for 25 minutes with an additional 5 minutes for questions and answers was well received. I was asked to do additional presentations on cumulative lifetime stress at three Jewel Collective meetings. This information was more age specific. The age groups covered were 19-29, (Emeralds), 30-39, (Amethysts), and 50-59, (Sapphires).⁴¹

⁴¹ In the Jewel (Women's) Ministry at St Paul each age group is identified by a specific gemstone. From ages birth to 18 they are pearls; ages 19-29, Emeralds; ages 30-39, Amethysts; ages 40-49, Black Diamonds; ages 50-59, Sapphires; ages 60-69, Rubies; and ages 70+, peridots.

Quilting was introduced to the Jewel crossover group at the church through an activity presented in February 2015 prior to the Summit. None of the women present had any quilting experience. The project was fairly simple. They each created their own Jewel Sistah applique to be included on a group quilt. Each sister designed and decorated the dress of her applique. It was



an excellent way for the women to work together, fellowship with one another and learn a new craft. However, the most remarkable thing about the project was it relieved some of the tension the women were feeling. The activity was held on a Friday night for two hours. Most of the women had never done any type of quilting or applique work in their lives.

At the start of the workshop there was quite a bit of apprehension in the room. Whenever something new is introduced, anxiety will set in. For those who were looking forward to learning and creating something new, there was excitement. However, for those who had no desire to ever sew a stitch in their life – anxiety. And true to the nature of anxiety in a group, there *was* resistance to the project, as the women were being challenged to use their creative imagination. According to Peter L. Steinke in *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, “When challenging, leaders will surely kick up the dust of anxiety, since resistance is a natural reaction to challenge . . . A leader has to expect people to raise opposition when the community is resting comfortably, and

then it is pushed, pulled, or stretched.”⁴² Knowing this would be a problem in advance from previous projects, I provided them with the pattern and all the materials they would need. Clear instructions were given and mothers were allowed to work with their daughters.

Once the women got started and their stress levels decreased, they began to enjoy decorating their applique in the company of one another. Some assisted other with placing jewels and making hair or head coverings. The mothers of the younger girls practically took over their daughters projects, so in order for the girls (Pearls) to do their own appliques the mothers were allowed to work on their own.

That night a bonding took place; women who knew one another only in passing were able to directly interact with each other. This set the stage for the upcoming demonstration project.

Development of the Inner Quilting Circle and the Voices of Tabitha

The next strategy in the pattern making process was to develop a team of Sistahs that would make up the Inner Quilting Circle, or the site team, and the voices of Tabitha. The Inner Quilting Circle would be the women who met to discuss what topics were to be included in the curriculum. They also assisted with preparation of materials for each session such as printing, assisting with steps in the quilting process, and help with distribution of supplies. They would also be responsible to meet after each session for discussion of what took place at the circle that session. The Voices of Tabitha were the women from the Inner Circle who volunteered to facilitate the discussions.

⁴² Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006), 73.

The first meeting was held in October 20, 2014 to review the proposal with Director of Women's Ministry at St. Paul Community Baptist Church. Three members of my advisory team were also present: Dr. Rita Strickland, Carla Gittens, and Minister Shirlene (Imani-Faith) Holman. The proposal was reviewed and accepted with great enthusiasm by Sistah Gloria and at that point it was time to select a site team who would help me to develop the project.

Each sistah present gave me words of encouragement and expressed the need for such a program not only for women here at the church but for women everywhere. Understanding that we are dying from diseases at a much greater rate than both our white counterparts and men it becomes imperative that we do something in the church; for the anxiety and stress we experience as African American women impacts not only our minds and bodies, but our souls as well. The church is oftentimes metaphorically called a Holy Hospital that is supposed to come to the aid of those who are suffering from spiritual dis-ease by being that beacon of light and hope in any and all of life's situations. When I was at the Grand Rounds, introducing my proposal for research to the doctors that had to approve for me to go to the next level, I started to think of each woman in the room and what she was bringing to the table.

Dr. Rita is a living archive of information on healing and transformation of the mind, body and soul. She is a master quilter, quilt historian, and doll maker—an artist in her own right. She is also a certified grief counselor. As Servant Leader of the Cancer Support Group, she sponsors a retreat for cancer survivors yearly. The transparency and experience that she shares is powerful, and her mastery of Womanist theology comes

from deep within her Spirit. She holds a PhD in Nursing from Columbia University in New York. My words for her are *resilience* and *wisdom*.

Sistah Gloria has so much brilliancy in her humility. She clearly understood what the women of the congregation needed. She was excited after reading the project proposal, because the planning, development and implementation was open to women of the congregation who had expressed an interest in leadership and developing programs. She was looking forward to something that would bring the women of St. Paul Community Baptist Church together. My words for her are *one accord and fellowship*.

My dear Sistah Carla – her grace and beauty unfolds as she becomes transparent and opens up to the Spirit and tells her story. She speaks her truths without fear, in the sense that there is no problem that is too powerful for God to help you overcome. Her story about the experiences she has overcome in life is an inspiration to many. Her connection to Spirit when she speaks or prays is phenomenal. My words for her are *prophetic and service*.

Sistah Minister Faith, Lord have Mercy. I know her as a fiery preaching woman of God. She sat quietly absorbing and pondering on the meeting of minds of SPCBC women. Faith is a minister at Bethany Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York. She appeared quite comfortable, and in her silence, her knowledge and wisdom showed through. Her question to the group: “Can outsiders participate?” Oh yes, and it is encouraged because what is being developed is a model for African American Christian women that is to be shared with others. We opened our doors to her and any other sistah that wished to attend. My word for her was *hospitality*.

Then there was me, Sistah Minister Pamela, seeing the need, hearing God's call to action. I could see the project unfolding, and the seed that GOD had planted in my Spirit six years ago was now being fertilized. I felt as if I were pregnant with the possibility of my calling into the ministry and was so thankful to have the women surrounding me in that moment to help me give birth. My words for myself were *in labor and needed my Sistahs to help me deliver.*

During the meeting, the topic came up of how our mothers and grandmothers used to gather together not only for church socials, and almost everyone in the room remembered how every morning or at some during the day, women would gather at the kitchen table for coffee and conversation. This was their opportunity to share ideas, issues, and problems and get resolutions. It was a time to laugh and a time to cry. It was a time that no man dare enter the room because this was "Women's time."

Dr. Rita raised the subject of liking the use of the word "sistah" as opposed to sister because of its spiritual connotation of holy time . . . women on a healing journeying together during this appointed time.

The quilting circle will be the catalyst for the conversation. The quilting would be a means to de-stress and reflect when the participants were alone. Conversations are cathartic and quilting when done in quiet time can be very soothing. Both provide the stimulus needed to lower the blood pressure, calm the nerves, and keep the hands out of the cookie jar. It is also an opportunity to share ideas, support one another as women, study the Bible and learn more about how to live life more abundantly and stress/drama free.

Development of the program curriculum and facilitators consisted of women in the congregation who had expressed an interest in motivational speaking or addressing issues that specifically impacted women. Some approached me, others I identified from Women's Bible study.

On-Site Team: The Inner Quilting Circle

The on-site team was selected based on three criteria: 1) Willingness to participate in developing their leadership, facilitating and mentoring skills; 2) the professional, creative, or theological skills; and 3) the ability to work well with groups.

The team consisted of:

- Alice Blackmon (Women's ministry, leadership, and massage therapy)
- Antoinette Davis (Women's ministry, leadership and mentoring)
- Carla Gittens (Advisor, Healer, theological studies, leadership)
- Irene McWilliams (Registered Nurse, health and wellness, quilter)
- Sharon Drummond (Prayer intercessor, leadership)
- Dr. Rita Strickland (Chief Advisor, Nursing educator, healer, mentor, leadership, master quilter)
- Manuela Davis (Healer)
- Julia Hayes (Women's Ministry)

Sharon Drummond and Manuela Davis had to drop out due to other commitments.

The first session was held at Carla's home. It was just an opportunity for us to get together and have a "Girls' Night." We decorated mirrors, got massages, partook in

libations, and ate dinner together. All of the team did not attend, but those who did had an opportunity to fellowship, have a great time, and create.

The second meeting was time to get to work. Three sessions were held with the on-site team for two hours and consisted of developing the curriculum and the team in preparation for the demonstration project which was to begin in May 2015. The session opened with “The Penny Project,” an icebreaker suggested by Sharon Drummond. Each of us was given a penny and was told to look at the year and recall something significant for them in that year. It all went smoothly, remembering birthdays, graduations and anniversaries. We all had happy memories until we got to one sistah, Antoinette, who had a penny that brought back memories of a tumultuous childhood. We discussed it for a while. All were supportive and understanding about her issues. It became apparent that one of the issues that would need to be discussed is our childhood. Forgiveness for those who have hurt you in childhood was something that the group agreed must be addressed at Tabitha’s Table. This would be one of the most important issues to discuss because Cumulative Lifetime Stress begins in our childhood or teen years and continues to build up throughout our lives.

It was agreed that we must have a substantial focus on God for God is the ultimate healer. There is healing in the Word, so we must include Scripture. Faith in God has been a sustaining force for African-American women. Whenever the road gets rough and our mountains are to rocky to climb, Black women in America have always turned to God to make a way out of no way. Whatever stressors life may bring on, just call on the Lord our God, and burdens will be lifted.

The next topic that the group felt important for the women was the *super woman syndrome*. Black women will work themselves to the point of complete burnout to care for family, work the job, help out the community, work at the church, and are forever taking care of others better than we take care of ourselves. Essentially, it is like Nannie tells Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston, “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world...”⁴³ This was true back in the 1930s when Hurston wrote this historic classic and is still true today. This country was built on the backs of African-American women, and many continue to carry its burdens . . . like a work mule.

Another issue the group felt important was telling the truth. Black women will lie, deny and cover up their weaknesses, problems, fears, mental and physical health issues; all for the sake of maintaining the image of strength. Many Black women feel a need to appear in control at all times, even when the world around and within them is falling apart. To show any weakness is a sign of failure. This only adds to the accumulation of stress over their lifetimes and eventually will break them down. It is time to tell the truth.

The importance of women coming together to discuss their problems and issues would be paramount for the discussions at Tabitha’s Table. N. Lynn Westfield states, “Gathering together is a basic act of humanness. While the rituals themselves may vary enormously – in intensity and duration, social significance and cultural origin, in communal meaning and personal adherence – their presence marks our relationships as

⁴³ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), 14.

distinctively human.”⁴⁴ Gathering is what makes us human. We are meant to be in relationship with one another.

The final topic would be based on resurrection. By coming to Tabitha’s Table, at the end of the quilting circle, it was anticipated that the women should experience a resurrection within themselves, the completion of a new creation, which in itself is cause for celebration.

The inner quilting circle paired the steps in making the quilt with each discussion topic. Each participant was to create her own quilt design based on her reflection of the topics. All of the supplies were to be provided for the first session. The first half of session one was an introduction to the topic, the project, signing of consent forms and the list of supplies they would need for the class.

Each session would be called a “quilting circle” because a circle is the shape that allows everyone to face one another and the facilitator or “Tabitha for the day” can sit in the center to speak. Each quilting circle would open with prayer. Then I would introduce the topic that has been brought to the women who sit at Tabitha’s Table for the day and give a brief teaching or sermonette on how this impacts women and can cause Cumulative Lifetime Stress. Then the instructions would be given for the quilting skill. Once that is done, the Voice of Tabitha would be introduced, and she would read Scripture and begin the discussion as the Sistahs worked on their quilts and joined in.

This curriculum was developed over four meetings. With the final curriculum in place, we met one final time to assign the Voices of Tabitha. (See Appendix C.)

⁴⁴ Nathan Mitchell, “Mystery and Manners,” *Worship* 67 (March, 1993): 164-73, quoted in N Lynne Westfield, *Dear Sisters: A Womanist Practice of Hospitality* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 25.

After each quilting circle, the inner circle would meet to evaluate and give feedback on the session.

Creating the Interpretive Quilt

The final piece to the development of the pattern was to piece together all of the fabrics or components that comprised this project to design an interpretive quilting model that will promote self-awareness and healing.

The first step, which was to develop an interpretive quilting process that will metaphorically be used as a means to release from the trauma and stress, was completed during the development phase of the inner quilting circle. The pattern for the quilt design was paired with the conversation topics. Dr. Strickland and I discussed and decided upon the quilting skill that, metaphorically through the quilt, would be necessary to complete the objective.

Participants for the project will be recruited through announcements during church services, personal contact and social media (Appendix D). The maximum number of participants was limited to twenty with an expectation that 75% of the participants would complete the project.

Each class session will meet weekly for two months. The activity or lesson in the crafting of the quilt will revolve around an issue or relationship that African-American women have lived through, are living through (or are stuck in) and how it impacted their lives. The introduction to the topic will include a combination of Womanist thought and prophetic teachings that can be applied by participants for everyday use.

During the gathering of women at Tabitha's table sitting and quilting together, instruction will be given on how to maintain healthy lifestyles and how to use quilting to relieve stress and anxiety. The Voices of Tabitha will engage the participants in

conversation using sermonettes, personal anecdotes and/or testimonies pertaining to issues that lead to Cumulative Lifetime Stress and how to overcome its impact in their lives.

Through the process of creating something new and original, the women will feel within their spirit that they have awakened a new creature within themselves with the ability to create a better life for themselves.

The ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) Survey will be administered at the beginning of the first session (Appendix E). The ACE Score looks at 10 types of childhood trauma. Five of them are personal and include physical abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect. Five items relate to other family members and include alcoholics, mothers who were victims of domestic violence, incarcerated family members, those diagnosed with mental illness, and those who have lost a parent through divorce, death or abandonment. There are more types of childhood traumas, but these are the ones most frequently listed in the Kaiser study that created the test. It is a guideline that links childhood trauma and chronic diseases that people develop as adults.⁴⁵ The results are easily tabulated by the participants and will be disclosed during the session that deals with childhood memories and forgiveness.

The post-survey that will be administered is the Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory (Appendix F). This survey was developed by Dr. Richard Rahe in 1998 to serve as a simple screening measure to determine over the period of one year the

⁴⁵ Jane Ellen Stevens, "Got Your ACE Score?" <http://acestoohigh.com/got-you-ace-score/> (accessed March 15, 2015).

probability that stress factors in one's life indicate susceptibility to stress induced health breakdown.⁴⁶

A final evaluation will be administered to the women to assess whether or not the project offered to them aided in relieving stress and provided an alternative and creative means in which to manage it (Appendix G). Each participant will be asked to write a reflective story that interprets what their quilt means based on the topics of discussion, and the finished quilts will be photographed. The photographs and their stories will be included in this dissertation and for future use in a book/workbook.

It was imperative that in preparation and implementation of this project, self-education and research on the use of art and quilting as therapy be done. I gained more knowledge on the subject through filmed documentaries on quilting, interviews, African-American literature and interviews with a circle of quilters who had worked together for many years.

With the design of the project completed, it was time to gather together the Sistahs and sit down together and begin Conversations at Tabitha's Table.

⁴⁶ The American Institute of Stress, "Self-Assessment," <http://www.stress.org/self-assessment/> (accessed March 11, 2016).

CHAPTER 5: IMPLEMENTATION CONVERSATIONS AT TABITHA'S TABLE

Introduction to the Project

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.

But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her; they laid her in an upper room.

And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them

Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.

But Peter put them all out, knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.

Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

(Acts 9:36-43, NKJV).

Have you ever wondered what life must have been like during the days of the early church? The Bible tells us detailed stories about the early church fathers. However, what must it have been like for the women? Acts 9:36-43 gives us just a snippet of the life of one woman. It does not tell us much more than she was known for doing good

works and charitable deeds. We know she must have been an excellent fashion designer and seamstress because the widows were showing Peter the tunics, the simple undergarments that were worn closest to the body underneath a cloak of fabric that was hand woven and stitched and other garments, which were probably more fashionable. The Scriptures tell us she became sick and died. How did this happen? How could God allow this Spirit-filled woman to become sick and die? In my Holy Ghost imagination, knowing that the community of Christ was under great persecution by the Jewish leadership and under oppression by the Roman Empire, poor Tabitha, or Dorcas in the Greek, possibly met her fate because she was overwhelmed by what was taking place in the world around her. Tabitha possibly was suffering from what is today known as Accumulated Life-time Stress Disorder, a psychosomatic disorder caused by living and experiencing stressful situations or living conditions over a prolonged period of time that are eventually manifested as actual physical disease if the stressors and distress to the mind are not alleviated.

Many of the illnesses in the New Testament could have been a result of this disorder given that the people of that time were under constant threats and oppression by the Roman government. Poverty was the norm during that time. There was the constant threat of violence at the hands of the Roman Legion that kept the peace within the Empire. Urban centers were often overpopulated and the people underserved by the government. The ruling classes held more than their share of the wealth and the Jewish aristocracies maintained their own self-interest. And, of course, taxes on the people were higher than they could often afford to pay to the Empire. If people not afford to pay, they could lose their land, be imprisoned or sold into slavery.

Women had it hard in those times. If you did not have the benefit of a father, husband, brother or son to care for you, you lived in a state of perpetual poverty. But somehow, through it all, the women of the early church were able to survive and the church thrived. That was then. But we are living in the here and now.

Not much has changed in our world today. Women in the urban community are still under pressure, though not as extreme as experienced by women in the early church. Violence, disease, poverty, poor housing and overcrowding in the urban communities still plague us and the government continues to turn a limited-sighted eye to the ills of our world. The majority of our households are headed by women. Although many of us work, we are at the lower end of the pay scale and sometimes the need to go to work is a forced necessity to maintain our families.

Oftentimes, we as Black women think about how bad we got it. Let's face it; we are caught up in a world of racism, classism, sexism, ageism . . . the isms are too numerous to name. It is no wonder that we are stressed out by whatever "ism" we find ourselves in. But we do not have to let them be the bane of our existence. As Black women, it is in our DNA to be resilient. We have to find new and create ways of resistance and resilience when dealing with the stress, the "isms", and the plight we find ourselves in.

It's time to stop saying "how bad we got it," and start looking at how good we have it. We have the power through the Creator Spirit of God that dwells within us to persevere and not only survive but be victorious in any situation or circumstance. All it takes is a mustard seed of faith, hope for a better tomorrow, and the creativity to make it happen.

A random survey was done among Christian women as to who they thought Tabitha was and what she must have been like. Many women felt she was a teacher; that being a disciple of Christ, a follower of The Way, she would gather women at her home and talk about God, Jesus, the church and other issues affecting them as women of God as she sewed their tunics and garments. But while she was stitching together their outer garments she was mending together the inner garment or mantle of their souls. They were being Spirit-led and Spirit-fed with the teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So we, as a community of women, can gather at the table and do the same. Through our discussions of the Bible, the teachings of Christ, the sharing our stories as we sit and stitch together, our quilts will become the mantles that bring healing and transformation to our souls. In these stressful times, from our stress-filled lives, we must come together to share our joys and pains of life, knowing that God can heal us from whatever is ailing us in our minds, bodies or souls.

Quilting Circle I: In the Beginning God Created...

AND God stepped out on space,
And He looked around and said,
“I’m lonely —
I’ll make me a world.”

And far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled,
And the light broke,
And the darkness rolled up on one side,
And the light stood shining on the other,
And God said, *“That’s good! ⁴⁷* (James Weldon Johnson, “The Creation”)

⁴⁷ James Weldon Johnson, “The Creation,” in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*. James Weldon Johnson, ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922), http://www.poetry-archive.com/j/the_creation.html#W2hg3req4BX4XkvR.99 (accessed December 12, 2013).

It is my contention that whenever God wants to make a change in this universe, God creates. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and all creatures and living plants. Then God created humankind in God's image and likeness . . . God created them to have Dominion over everything on the earth. If we are created in God's image and likeness and have been given Dominion over everything on the earth that means God has placed every skill and ability within us to change our world just by saying, "Let there be light." Because we are made in the image of God, (Genesis 1:26) we, too have been given the gift of creativity; we, too have the power by our creator, to create.

Rollo May defines one aspect of creativity as "the process of bringing something new into being."⁴⁸ He distinguishes between superficial aestheticism and authentic forms of creativity in that the former deals only with appearances and not with reality itself. This is art done for the sake of decoration, a way of making life prettier. The latter, however, "deals with giving birth to some new reality."⁴⁹ This form of creativity goes deeper into enlarging the human consciousness. "Creativity is the most basic manifestation of a man or woman fulfilling his or her being in the world."⁵⁰ When looking at creativity from this perspective when we create something it is the process of actualizing ourselves. It is bringing into being. In the case of coming to Tabitha's Table, it is taking what has been laid in the depths of your mind, bringing it into your consciousness and developing it into something different. It is taking that which is painful and ugly and creating something that heals and becomes something beautiful.

⁴⁸ May, 39.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 40.

This was introduced during the first class because the whole purpose of this project is to bring the participants to the table to encounter an issue or issues that impact them negatively as women. The issues to be covered for the project session or journey as I like to call it—the color of your pain, the reality of God in your life, childhood memories and forgiveness, the Superwoman, truth teller, women gathering, and resurrection—carry with them a creative process designed to really make the participant look within herself and encounter the lesson to be learned from that experience. As Erykah Badu says, “Peace and blessings manifest with every lesson learned.”⁵¹ Women tend to store emotions they want to repress in their subconscious mind. Thus, by bringing the issue to consciousness, coupled with Scripture and literary writings that leave us food for thought, there can be a “breakthrough of material from the unconscious dimension.”⁵² The harsh realities of our lives as Black women are brought out into our consciousness through the realization of others who come to the table with their stories, facing the issue and learning the lesson. The addition of that lesson to the quilt gives a visual beauty to a harsh reality. Out of that tough truth, we have created something new.

To unleash the subconscious takes courage. For these women to undertake this journey was in itself courageous, not knowing anything other than they were here to take a quilting workshop, which was going to be different (see Appendix C). According to Paul Tillich in *The Courage to Be*:

Courage is the affirmation of one’s essential nature, one’s inner aim or entelechy, but it is an affirmation which has in itself the character of “in spite of.” It includes the possible and, in some cases, the unavoidable sacrifice of elements which also belong to one’s being but which, if not

⁵¹ Erykah Badu, Greg Kurstin, and, Shaznay Lewis, *On & On* (Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Warner/Chappell Music, Inc., Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., Universal Music Publishing Group, 1988).

⁵² May, 61.

sacrificed would prevent us from reaching our actual fulfillment . . . It is the beauty and goodness of courage that the good and the beautiful are actualized in it.⁵³

Taking a look at what is kept bottled up inside, the “stuff” we do not want others to see takes courage. It may become buried within as opposed to seeking a solution to it. If left unattended, it can begin to fester in the subconscious mind, spilling out into our everyday existence through attitudes demonstrated towards others. What is thought to be hidden and consciously forgotten about is still deep within the psyche. Whenever we encounter a similar situation, we may, rather than dealing with it, either avoid it or not address it in a manner that has a satisfactory resolution.

Eventually, there are so many bottles of negative experiences submerged within it that they may begin to overflow into physical manifestations in the body. Or, if lessons are not learned from the negative experiences, it can stunt our emotional and spiritual growth. It may cause stagnation in life by repetitively resolving situations or issues in the same ineffective ways, with the same stressors and complaints about doing them.

Experiences in life are necessary for growth. Successfully dealing with experiences, whether positive or negative is part of the transformative processes of life. With transformation there must be change. Change can be painful; therefore, growth is painful. But is this a reason not to grow? Is this a reason not to try to make a change? Daughters of God are called to be obedient. There must be submission at some point to God and a willingness to risk the pain. The women at the table were asked to reflect on their free will to choose – choose to be the obedient self. In regards to this obedient self, Tillich contends:

⁵³ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 4.

It commands itself according to the law of life, the law of self-transcendence. The will which commands itself is the creative will. It makes whole out of fragments and riddles of life. It does not look back, it stands beyond a bad conscience, it rejects the “spirit of revenge” which is the innermost nature of self-accusation and of the consciousness of guilt, it transcends reconciliation, for it is the will to power. In doing all this, the courageous self is united with life itself and its secrets.⁵⁴

The women were given a moment to reflect on how they feel when their world is crumbling and their life is turning upside down. But from the pieces, knowing that being made in God’s own image and likeness, they can create a heaven right here on earth. God gives each one who sits at this table the power by the Holy Spirit to subdue any crazy circumstance or situation that may come. All it takes is the courage to face it, to take those fragments that are collecting and creating clutter in your mind and create something new.

Creating your Background

Tabitha Speaks: Minister Pam - What is the Color of your Pain?

In Him was life, and that life was the light of wo/men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” (John 1:4-5, NIV)

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (John 8:12, NIV)

One of the discussions that may have occurred at Tabitha’s table was about Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Light. Jesus is the Light to a world living in darkness. “Color is the byproduct of the spectrum of light, as it is reflected or absorbed, as received by the human eye and processed by the human brain”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid., 29-30.

⁵⁵ DevX.com, “What is Color,” <http://www.devx.com/projectcool/Article/19954> (accessed December 12, 2015).

Colors can generate certain emotions within us. “Artists and interior designers have long understood how color can dramatically affect moods, feelings, and emotions. It is a powerful communication tool and can be used to signal action, influence mood, and cause physiological reactions.”⁵⁶ For example, the color red can trigger anger. While the color white makes us think of purity. The Sistahs at the table were asked to envision the color of their pain. For the pain of their darkest moments, they are really looking at the light that shows through the darkness.

If color can emit emotions, whether they are positive or negative that color can be used to spark the creative imagination . . . whether it is positive or negative. If it is negative, what is the lesson that must be learned and why? As the old saying goes, “there is a light at the end of the tunnel.” Whatever journey life is taking these Sistahs in this quilting circle on, understand there is a lesson that must be learned, and they will begin to see the light. From that light, be encouraged to keep pressing forward.

Seeing colors lets us know we are alive. The storm has been weathered and the gray sky is now blue. When the sun shines through, the light breaks into an array of colors and creates a rainbow. Like Coco in *Mama Day*, returning from near death to life, after all her pain and agony states, “So glad that the sun finally out to stay and I could see my surroundings in its true colors: Yellow, blues, greens and browns . . . My head felt free and light.”⁵⁷

“In the beginning God said let there be light.” From this light God created every color of the spectrum out of darkness. So therefore out of darkness God will bring us into

⁵⁶ Kendra Cherry, “Color Psychology: How Colors Impact Moods, Feelings, and Behaviors,” <http://psychology.about.com/od/sensationandperception/a/colorpsych.htm> (accessed December 12, 2013).

⁵⁷ Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 273.

the light. Keep in mind, God created light out of darkness . . . so whenever the feeling of darkness comes or the world and life feel void and without form, know that the Spirit of God is hovering over the face of the waters of tears. See the light out of the darkness and know that it is good . . . and create!

Imagine Tabitha's fabric stash. When a widow or woman came into her shop feeling depressed, dressed in black or drab mourning colors, she would pull out her fabric stash of various colors to find the right color to elevate her spirit from one of sadness to joy.

The Sistahs were then asked to volunteer to read selected poems from the choreopoem, *For Colored Girls Who Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Was Enuf*, by Ntozake Shange. This was to begin the creative process of reading in order to better visualize what was meant by associating color with feelings. No explanation is given by Shange for choosing the colors of the women other than "physicalizing the image, giving the rainbow a human form."⁵⁸ It is the voices of seven women, seven personalities, with seven different issues but one common problem – issues of the heart: LOVE. "The personal story of a woman became every woman, the solo voice becoming many. Each poem fell into its rightful place, a rainbow of colors, shapes, and timbres of voice, my solo instrument blossoming into a cosmic chamber ensemble."⁵⁹

They were then told to reflect upon the following questions and how it related to the stress of situations that they felt in their own lives.

⁵⁸ Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide, When the Rainbow Is Enuf: A Choreopoem* (New York: Scribner Poetry, 1997), 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.

1. Is your pain from being with someone sexually but yet after the act feeling alone?
2. Do you feel someone is always taking advantage of you and then walking away with all that you gave and leaving you with nothing?
3. Do you feel like you have been stood up, lied to and denied true love so many times or just that one time and you refuse to look forward to love ever again?
4. As a woman of color, do you feel out of tune with who you are? With life? With the world around you? Do you need to be renewed, reaffirmed and refreshed?
5. Do you feel like a bitch?
6. Has life just set you up for a big letdown?
7. Are you living with the buried memory of an abortion, a miscarriage, or a child you never had? Or even feeling the shame of the child you did have, but kept secret that you were not married when you had her/him?

After reading the poems, the Sistahs began to discuss their feelings behind how they mirrored issues that they were facing in their lives. One Sistah remarked, “Yeah, my husband got away with all of my stuff . . . I was left alone to raise two kids by myself.” Another remarked, “It has been hard for me to embrace life as being good, because I have seen so much bad . . . why does it have to be bad?” Then another remarked, “The only way you get anything out of life is to be a bitch . . . I don’t like it, but it keeps people from taking advantage of me.”

Nevertheless, the consensus of the group was that no matter what they have gone through in this life, no matter the heart aches, the stress, the anxieties, and the anguish, they could rest assured that in that lonely midnight hour, while tossing and turning in bed, walking the floors questioning their lives and the mistakes that they make, God is with them. She lives within each of their hearts. She created us in Her image and likeness, giving us the power to change our world. And most of all, She loves us – fiercely.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ This poem is very radical for a church that is patriarchal in its hierarchical structure. I was told not to address God in the feminine as a minister of the church. However, I always say, God has a funny

A handout on the meaning of colors was given to the women so that they may better select the color that reflected negativity and/or positivity in their lives. (For a full explanation, see Angela Wright, “Psychological Properties of Colors,” *Color Affects*, <http://www.colour-affects.co.uk/psychological-properties-of-colours.>)

Once this was done, the process of dying the fabric began.⁶¹ The Sistahs started mixing their colors and painting it onto their fabric. They marveled at how the colors looked on the cloth. Some kept adding layers onto their fabric, although the original color looked just fine. As they were doing this step, one Sistah commented, “I like green because I need money.” Another commented, “I’ll use red, because I got anger issues.” Then another said, “I will use blue, to match my mood.” “I am going to add in some orange and yellow because the sun always shines through a bad situation.” When the session came to an end, one Sistah commented, “Wow, that felt good!” The others began to agree with her.

After the first session, the Inner Quilting Circle met to evaluate the process. Rita pointed out that when they mixed the paint with the shaving cream (which was the dye medium) it became lighter than the original color which was like the lightening up of their pain. It was also noticed that some Sistahs were over-doing it when applying the dye to the fabric. The more stress and/or pain they were experiencing, the more layers of dye they applied to their fabric. Nevertheless, each Sistah’s fabric came out beautifully and they all were excited about what they had created from the colors of their pain. Another observation made was that there were items the Sistahs felt would help them keep up

way of doing things. I had only made a copy of this poem for myself but somehow it managed to find its way into one of the Sistah’s hands and she read it.

⁶¹ Instructions of the quilt can be found in Appendix M.

with their work and the handouts. They began to talk about what they could donate to help the cause. Items such as folders, tote bags, and pencils, markers, taking pictures and making copies were all offered. Now that is Sistahology . . . women coming together in our pain bringing whatever they had to the table, and healing in the gathering Sistahs. One can only imagine what each woman who came to Tabitha's home brought with her from the gathering.

Each session opens with prayer, Scripture reading and a sermonette or introduction to the topic, creative literature, poetry or music. This was followed by (although the order varied), a conversation initiated each session by a different "Voice of Tabitha," from the Inner Quilting Circle.

Quilting Circle II: There must be a God Somewhere

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed by God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. (Hebrews 11: 1-3, NIV)

Here's the thing, say Shug. The thing I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don't know what you looking for. Trouble do it for most folks, I think. Sorrow, lord. Feeling like shit.

It? I ast.

Yeah, It. God ain't a he or a she, but a It.

But what do it look like? I ast.

Don't look like nothing, she say. It ain't a picture show. It ain't something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself. I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it...But more than anything, God love admiration...wanting to share a good thing. I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it...People think pleasing God is all God

care about. But any fool living in the world can see It always trying to please us back.⁶²

At the second quilting circle, the women were asked to ponder the mystery of God? Who is this supernatural, all-powerful being that is credited with creation of the heavens and the earth? Everywhere and everything God is. Christians profess that they have faith that God will save us from any situation. The women were asked, “Do we really have 100% faith and assurance in the fact that God is?” Then I inquired, “When was the first time you realized God is?” God is in nature. God is in the breeze, for the Spirit of God hovers over the face of the earth; God’s Spirit is every present in the atmosphere. God is present in the flowers that bloom in the spring time. That is why when Shug says she feels God gets pissed off when we walk past a field of the color purple and don’t take notice is one of the most spiritually profound statements from Alice Walker’s, *The Color Purple*. Our relationship with God is ever present with us, even when it is not acknowledged.

Then the women were asked to imagine what the world would be like if God’s presence was always acknowledged in every little way in their lives? This is a conversation that Tabitha may have brought to the table with the women of Joppa.

Tabitha Speaks: Sistah Faith’s Story – I’ve come this far by Faith

As an African American woman born in the 20th century I have come to know that God is mysterious and as scripture records, “God’s ways are past finding out” (Romans 11:33). I also learned by my varied experiences that God is boundless, merciful and relational. As Sophia testified in the Color Purple, “I know there is a God.” I, like Sofia,

⁶² Alice Walker: *The Color Purple: A Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 195-96.

know God because of my encounters with others and God's self-revelation to my heart and soul. God to me is as the Psalter records in Psalm 18: 2, "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation my stronghold." Like King David there have been times throughout my sojourn thus far that God has been my help even when I didn't know God was there. I've been in a few rough and hard places. I was molested as a child, felt emotional duress, low self-esteem, psychological and verbal abuse; not to mention crack cocaine addiction. I have been a victim of sexism and I have been intolerant against my daughter's sexuality. Through all that I have experienced so far I have watched God enable me to move to a place of acceptance, gratitude, and praise.

*In her book, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Delores Williams discusses the exploitation of Hagar and juxtaposes that to the plight of many African American women through slavery, Jim Crow, and sexism in the Black Church. She sees in Hagar's story her strength and her ability to see God working in her situation. God speaks to her and provides for her the capacity to overcome her current situation. With knowledge by revelation Hagar spoke and declared, "You are El-roi," for she said, "have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" (Gen. 16:13). I have been given the ability to also see the hand of God at work in abusive and oppressive situations of my life. When I felt lost and alone crushed and devastated God made God's self-present for me as a rock. The Divine who influences and controls all things, brings into existences that which S/He wills. As noted with Hagar, her experience with God influenced her life and that of her son; which caused her to proclaim that God sees' because of the provision received and power she felt. So too I have been able to perceive the God who has been, is and will*

always be my deliverer and my fortress. As Professor Padilla said, “The God who is always becoming...” This Holy and awe-inspiring God who is, “the same yesterday today and forever more” (Hebrews 11:8), brings into view those things from my childhood that caused me to feel invisible. It is because of my belief that God has seen me all the days of my life that I can declare the full complement of the God –head present at every turn.

As a young girl I felt the presence of God in the few times I heard the adult church choir sing, “We’ve come this far by faith.” That song has stayed with me and today I still feel the power and presence of God when I hear it sung. I felt the misery and torment of abandonment when my father moved to California. I was molested by a childhood friend’s father and felt the pains of guilt of not telling my mother. Although I didn’t fully know or understand the whole extent of God at that young age; God was operating in my life. I believe the Creator was imparting self into a deep and concrete place in my heart where I could meet and reflect upon God and my life experiences in adulthood. God saw me in my emotional anguish as a child and kept me sane in the midst of those feelings of guilt, shame, abandonment and even hopelessness. As I reflect upon the machinations of God I realize that S/He was my shield, fortress, and my refuge. God kept my mind in those experiences so that at the appropriate time the lesson could be used to aid someone else.

I must admit that it sometimes boggles my mind when I think about where the Creator God has brought me from, with the multiplicity of hardships that I’ve endured. Yet deep within my being I know that it was and is all for God’s Glory. For over 10 years I was addicted to crack cocaine. I knew better because I am a nurse but I didn’t know I could do better. A failing second marriage plunged what little self-esteem I had into a

toilet backed up with years of poisonous putrid pain, and unresolved issues, and nauseating vomit laced with depression and grief. Reflecting upon those days I realize that I had suicidal ideations and was actually killing myself slowly. But I wasn't only doing harm to myself; I was carrying my youngest daughter in my womb and poisoning her as well. Guilt shame and despair was the order of business in my life and yet I know now that God had a plan.

I began to get a better sense of God as I despaired of life. While labor pains hit me with my last child, I didn't let my crack smoking partner's husband and cousin know because I didn't want them to smoke up the supply. My body was so stressed as I went to the hospital my herpes was flaring up and I knew I would have to have a C-section otherwise my unborn child could be born blind. Her blood wasn't tested for drugs nor was mine, but the Divine spared me from possibly going to jail and having my children placed in foster care. However, that incident didn't stop my addiction. I plunged further into the sewer of despair until the Almighty showed up mightily in my life and I could not deny God's presence and distinct operation any longer. A drunken binge landed me in a detoxification and drug rehabilitation facility for about 40 days. Reflection, meditation and a few group sessions helped me to begin to open up to the grace and mercy of God. I see the Divine as my fortress and my deliver. The Mighty and magnificent Persons of the God-head saw fit to show up and helped me to realize the love that was imparted and to accept it. Just like the Israelites that were covered by God through their wilderness wanderings, God redeemed me from drugs; and having delivered me from psychological and emotional oppressive forces became the rock on which I would stand. The love of

God also permeated my very being even during the fight against internal and external demons of sexism and heterosexism.

Expressing the love of God even in the midst of opposition has been documented well throughout the history of Christianity. Julian of Norwich one of many women mystics was a vessel who yielded to God. She learned through revelation and communion that God had a plan for her life. Julian received revelations of Divine Love, as she called them, in the fourteenth century at a time when it wasn't widely accepted by the established order for a woman to write scholarly about her encounters with God. So profound were her experiences that I felt in her writings a kindred spirit that helped me to truly receive the love of God and walk in it, she writes:

In a vision he showed me a little thing, the size of a hazel-nut in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with my mind's eye and thought, "What can this be?" And the answer came to me, "it is all that is made." I wondered how it could last, for it was so small I thought it might suddenly have disappeared. And the answer in my mind was, "it lasts and will last forever because God loves it; and everything exists in the same way by the love of God." In this little thing I saw three properties; the first is that God made it; the second is that God loves it; the third is that God cares for it.⁶³

Knowing that I am created in the image of God loved and cared for has done great things for my self-esteem; however it was not always that way. Reflecting on those feelings of oppression and dealing with sexism I'm reminded that being denied the freedom to serve God as a minister in the church where God called me into ministry has not been easy. Jacquelyn Grant asserts, "The fact that the Bible speaks of God in both feminine and masculine imagery is evidence that the traditionally accepted masculine imagery of God must be rejected." It must be cast aside because God is Spirit (Luke

⁶³ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press, 2013), Chapter 5.

4:24) without gender assignment. Mankind has assigned “masculine imagery” to the Divine and some humans like me have decided that same gender loving people should be rejected as well as women who feel called to preach. Not accepting my daughter’s sexuality caused her a great deal of emotional duress. Suppression in any form stifles the soul and drowns out all joy.

James Cone, that prolific writer and author of many books, discussed at length what the black man and woman has suffered at the hands of racist white people from slavery, Jim Crow and segregation. God rose up people like Ella Baker, Martin Luther King, Jr. and others to shed light on the injustices perpetrated against African American people in the United States. I recognize that cruelty is not limited to racism alone; I've heard it said that “hurt people hurt people.” I suffered under oppressive situations and unfortunately I became a victimizer. God had to show me the ways in which I was doing harm to others and in reality doing harm to God's being.

James Cone states in his book, God of the Oppressed,

The divine will come in an indicative form and not as an imperative. God enters into the social context of oppression and liberates the people into a new existence. At the precise moment that divine liberation happens, a divine claim is laid upon the oppressed to be what God has made them.⁶⁴

Coming to terms with the fact that God was calling me to be and do better has been a struggle but I know that I will, with the help of my strong deliverer, be all that God wants me to be.

I have taken a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education which has allowed me to delve deeper into why I do what I do so that I can better serve another human being. I have found that God Almighty meets me at my job to aid and speak life and healing into the

⁶⁴ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000).

lives of some New York City school children and their parents as a school nurse. This journey toward and in God is amazing; it is difficult and God is still the greatest mystery revealed to my life. I say with Saint Augustine of Hippo, “You have made us to be toward you and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”⁶⁵

Some years ago I travelled a road that deviated from a fuller understanding of God and Christ; on that road I encountered my paternal grandmother. Being married to a man who believed in polygamy but not in taking financial responsibility for his family led me to despair. I became depressed and soon resorted to crack cocaine to numb my pain. After leaving and returning to the marital home several times in hopes that a second marriage would not end in divorce, I found myself with my three youngest children at grandma’s house. As I wept on her shoulder, she said something that has stayed with me and literally transformed my life, “Just give it to Jesus baby; he’ll take care of it.” For my grandma who has now gone on to glory, Jesus was the answer to my woes, and He would take care of everything that troubled my life. He was her victorious savior and she knew that he would conquer every problem and negative situation affecting my life and that of my children.

Grandma LeGall may not have known that I had two abortions, was a crack head, liar, and a thief, but she felt the sorrow of my soul and believed that Jesus had the power to “take care of it.” The Bible records Jesus as saying, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you,

⁶⁵ Augustine, *Confessions* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press, 2013), Book1, 1.

and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30)"⁶⁶?

Other Sistahs began to tell their stories of how they came to believe that God is. I will not go into details here because they will tell their own stories later. One thing for sure, every woman at the table had a story to tell. Some more bitter than others. Many had tears welling up in their eyes as Faith spoke, as if they were holding on tight to their own pain and troubles in life. I heard one Sistah say, "I am not alone." However, they cannot stay stuck in their stories. They must acknowledge them and move on.

Recreating your World: Placing the Spirit of God into your Quilt

This was the second step in this creative journey at Tabitha's Table. The Sistahs were asked to visualize what is it in nature that lets you know God is omnipresent. Was it the rising or setting of the sun, flowers, trees, lightning or the wind? Could it be the ocean? One Sistah commented, "Mines is a butterfly – seeing it transform from a caterpillar emerging from a cocoon as a beautiful butterfly." Keeping in mind the colors of your background they were instructed to reflect on God has brought them through. They were to draw an item in nature the best they could. Many did not feel artistic enough at this point so they were given biblical flower patterns taken from *Flowers of the Bible* by Helga Curtis and used in this step of the process.⁶⁷ I intentionally chose to use this book because the flower patterns are taken from Scriptures in the Bible. However, the Spirit of Creativity caught hold of each of the Sistahs, and each of their flowers took on a different design. No two were alike. Though the circle started off with tears, it ended

⁶⁶ Shirlene "Imani Faith" Holman, "I've Come This Far by Faith," (Lecture, Conversations at Tabitha's Table, the St. Paul Community Baptist Church, Brooklyn, July 18, 2015).

⁶⁷ Helga Curtis, *Flowers of the Bible* (Berne, IN: House of White Birches: 2003).

in laughter when the Sistahs were able to see the flowers that were representative of God in their lives. A few were a little disgruntled because theirs did not look like the pictures in the book. But let's face it, are any of our lives picture perfect?

The Inner Quilting Circle met afterwards for discussion of the day's session. All agreed that Faith's story was a good way to start the conversation because it made others feel comfortable to know they were in a safe space that they could release some of the pent up anxieties that they had been holding in about their own lives.

Prelude to Quilting Circle III: Wisdom from Queen Mother Sarah Plowden

At the beginning of the third workshop session, Queen Mother Sarah Plowden, the Chief Prayer intercessor of the church came to grace us with her wisdom. Queen Mother always has a way of putting things into perspective especially when it comes to women. She was the first coordinator of Women's Ministry at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church. Due to the unique issues that Black women were facing in America and in the church, she felt it was necessary to have a part of the ministry be intentional towards the development of women.

Since 1984, the Women's Ministry at St. Paul Community has been a robust ministry touching the lives of thousands of women in our congregation & community. Renamed Jewels in 2000, this Jewel Ministry offers 10+ growth groups to meet the needs of SPCBC women and girls ages 1-70+.⁶⁸

The SPCBC Department of Women's (Jewel) Ministry is dedicated to educating and empowering women "of all ages, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds with

⁶⁸ The St. Paul Community Baptist Church, "Women's Ministry"
<http://www.spcbc.com/getinvolved> (accessed December 21, 2015).

programs that focus on learning how to manage daily life through study and application of the Word of God.”⁶⁹

Queen Mother has taught the women of SPCBC over the years in Bible Study, growth groups and on an individual basis on how to live their lives for God and their families, while caring for themselves. As Chief Prayer Intercessor she prays for the Pastor, the church, and the community. She is truly a blessing to the congregation and we were honored to have her speak to us and share with us the importance of women coming together and sharing.

There is no doubt that Tabitha, like our Queen Mother, told biblical stories and words of wisdom to the women that gathered in her home. Just as Tabitha, our Queen Mother does the same for us. Listen as she imparts her wisdom on the women who have gathered at Tabitha’s Table.

She began by reading from Genesis 38:

At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hirah. There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. He married her and made love to her, she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, who was named Er. She conceived again and gave birth to a son and named him Onan. She gave birth to still another son and named him Shelah. It was at Kezib that she gave birth to him.

Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the LORD’s sight; so the LORD put him to death.

Then Judah said to Onan, “Sleep with your brother’s wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to raise up offspring for your brother.” But Onan knew that the child would not be his; so whenever he slept with his brother’s wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from providing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in the LORD’s sight; so the LORD put him to death also.

⁶⁹ Ibid., http://www.spcbc.com/pages/page.asp?page_id=289436.

Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, “Live as a widow in your father’s household until my son Shelah grows up.” For he thought, “He may die too, just like his brothers.” So Tamar went to live in her father’s household.

After a long time Judah’s wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah, to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went with him.

When Tamar was told, “Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep,” she took off her widow’s clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife.

When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, “Come now, let me sleep with you.”

“And what will you give me to sleep with you?” she asked.

“I’ll send you a young goat from my flock,” he said.

“Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?” she asked.

He said, “What pledge should I give you?”

“Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand,” she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow’s clothes again.

Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her. He asked the men who lived there, “Where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?”

“There hasn’t been any shrine prostitute here,” they said.

So he went back to Judah and said, “I didn’t find her. Besides, the men who lived there said, ‘There hasn’t been any shrine prostitute here.’”

Then Judah said, “Let her keep what she has, or we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you didn’t find her.”

About three months later Judah was told, “Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant.”

Judah said, “Bring her out and have her burned to death!”

As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. “I am pregnant by the man who owns these,” she said. And she added, “See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are.”

Judah recognized them and said, “She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn’t give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not sleep with her again.

When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand; so the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, “This one came out first.” But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, “So this is how you have broken out!” And he was named Perez.

Then she began to teach the Sistahs at the Table:

I tell you this story because it is very important for us to realize as women that we sometimes will find ourselves in a situation that we are not sure of what we can do or how we can get out of it. We cannot keep ourselves isolated, locked up in our father’s house and expect the situation to resolve itself. There is no doubt that someone had to tell Tamar what she needed to do and how she had to do it in order for her to resolve the problem of not having a child for her husband. How do you think she found out what to do? More than likely, the women told her.

You see, it was a part of their tradition that a widow must have a son who would receive her late husband’s inheritance and care for her. But because her first husband was killed, the duty fell upon the second brother. When the second brother died, Judah did not want to risk the life of the third and youngest son who was still a child. So he told Tamar to leave and live with her father until Shelah was an adult. He had no intentions of risking the life of his third son by having him sleep with Tamar.

The text does not mention it, but it is quite possible someone had to tell Tamar what she needed to do in order to bear a child in the line of Judah. So, knowing the

predicament Tamar was in she had to have been schooled by the women. The older women knew the routine of the men during sheep shearing season. They knew that the men would go to Timnah and along the road there would be prostitutes. Someone had to inform her of where to sit, how to dress and what to do to entice Judah into having sex with her. Someone knew that he would have no money and what she needed to ask for payment and proof of the sexual transaction that would take place. It is doubtful that a man would give her this information. Who could it have been? Who could she turn to for help? The women. She had to go to the women for help because sometimes there are something's only another woman can help another woman with. So when you gather together as women, you are helping one another out with things that only women can do for one another. So the women gather together as you are doing at Tabitha's Table to help each other as you go through the journey of life.”⁷⁰

Quilting Circle III – Childhood Memories: Lessons on Forgiveness

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (Matthew 6:14, NIV)

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16, NIV)

Often Cumulative Lifetime Stress begins with events that take place in our childhood. Many of the women at Tabitha's Table did not grow up in the ideal two-story house with a basement and backyard in a nice middle class neighborhood, with two

⁷⁰ Sarah Plowden, “The Story of Tamar” (Lecture, Conversations at Tabitha's Table, the St. Paul Community Baptist Church, July 25, 2015).

parents, and a dog name Ruff. They may or may not have attended private school, a decent public school, church or summer camp. They may or may not have lived in the peace and security of their homes or neighborhoods. Most had experienced racism, classism and sexism in their homes or communities. Some knew what it felt like to have a close friend shot to death, beaten by the police or gang, or a friend be strung out on drugs or die from an overdose. Some have experienced child neglect, abuse or sexual molestation. Some had parents who were substance abusers, experienced teen pregnancy, the list could go on.

The results from the ACE Survey taken during Quilting Circle 1 were reviewed. The average score for the group was three, indicating that there was a moderate risk among the group for the development of disease, social and emotional problems stemming from childhood trauma. However, the mode, or most frequently occurring score was four, which occurred 5 times, indicating that 30% were at high risk for developing disease, social and emotional problems resulting from childhood trauma and stress.

Children do not come with the instructions: Fragile Handle with Care! Often, the adults do not see the damage that was being done, only doing what they knew how to do. Someone recently said to me, “When you don’t know any better, you cannot do any better.” I don’t know how much I agree with that statement, but Single Black female headed households generally try to do the best they know how, just as their mothers did before them.

However, children are breakable. All it takes is to look at the children in the community and some of the school system and you will see broken children. Whatever

the childhood experience may be, children often learn to adjust. They may block out the experience or choose not to deal with the situation or person who has damaged them. They never have forgiven that person and bury the thought of them deep within the subconscious mind. Thinking they have forgotten and moved on with our lives, the damage that was done is burning like a hot coal in their subconscious psyche. Michael S. Barry states in *The Forgiveness Project*:

If we are a field of wheat, ripe for the harvest: FIRE! We will burn with anger, resentment, thoughts of revenge, and our memories of the event will serve as fuel for the flames. But as the proverb reminds us, fire falling on grassless ground extinguishes itself. Is it possible to become grassless ground? How can we, in light of traumatic experiences we face, resist becoming ignited with rage, anger and hatred? And further, assuming that we find ourselves enraged (which is a common human response), how do we put out the fire?⁷¹

When we who have been broken in childhood come to Christ, that which is burning in us, stealing our peace and joy. We often want to demonize those who have hurt us and keep the fire of hatred and revenge burning within us. This only leads to more stress, that we try to hide or think we have forgotten. However, somewhere at some unknown time in our lives, we will encounter that feeling or a similar experience and the flame will be ignited once again.

As followers of the Way, Jesus says that forgiveness is necessary for our spiritual growth and salvation. The topic of forgiveness is definitely something that would have been discussed at Tabitha's Table.

⁷¹ Michael S. Barry, *The Forgiveness Project: The Startling Discovery of How to Overcome Cancer, Find Health, and Achieve Peace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011), 131-32.

“*Nikki-Rosa*”
Recited by Alice Blackmon

Childhood remembrances are always a drag if you’re Black
You always remember things like living in Woodlawn
With no inside toilet and if you become famous or something they never talk
about how happy you were to have your mother all to yourself and
How good the water felt when you got your bath from one of those big tubs that
folk in Chicago barbecue in and somehow when you talk about home it never gets
across how much you understood their feelings
As the whole family attended meetings about Hollydale
And even though you remember your biographers never understand your father’s
pain as he sells his stock and another dream goes
And though you’re poor it isn’t poverty that concerns you and though they fought
a lot it isn’t your father’s drinking that makes any difference but only that
everybody is together and you and your sister have happy birthdays and very
good Christmases
And I really hope no white person ever has cause to write about me because they
never understand
Black love is Black wealth and they’ll probably talk about my hard childhood and
never understand that all the while I was quite happy.⁷²

Tabitha Speaks: Antoinette’s Story – Forgive and Forgiveness

Antoinette begins to speak to the Sistahs at the table:

Dealing with childhood memories can be challenging because a child goes through stuff that they have no control over. You look for protection/help from adults but they don’t give help because they are going through their stuff and cannot deal with kids’ stuff or are afraid to help.

“Better you than me,” they will say, keeping quiet and refuse to see what’s going on around them. You act out in school and are put on psychotropic meds but when you go to the doctor the ones who are to protect you tell you don’t tell what goes on in our house...”

Antoinette stops abruptly and says,

⁷² Nikki Giovanni and Virginia C. Fowler, “*Nikki-Rosa*,” in *The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni, 1968-1998* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2007), 53.

I cannot keep doing this. I thought I could talk to you women at the table today about what you are going through, when I need to be addressing my stuff. I grew up to be a teenager, running from the only place of help I knew, the church. But I did not know church could help because that the place where those adults who were supposed to protect me would shine and hide who they really were from everyone, giving that appearance of the picture perfect family, until we got back home.

As a child, I never thought I was pretty because nobody in the house told me... but the boys who I liked that like to make me feel. Then there is the boy I liked that is willing to stick around after I had a baby. However, since I was not taught anything positive as a child about myself or relationships, he didn't stay with me. Now I am going crazy because the hidden stuff is coming to the surface.

One became many men because now I am pretty and feeling sexy even though nobody stayed with me long until I met a man who stayed. He brought two friends along, Mr. Pipe and Mr. White Rock. They stayed too.

Eventually I was abandoned by the only person who wanted to stay with me, my child. I was sick, and had to deal with the reality that the only person who wanted to stay with me during all my childhood stuff was in fact a child herself. I could not properly raise her. No one taught me how and how could I properly raise a child when no one raised me? So she was going to have to go through some crazy stuff of her own. I tried to protect her but you protected her to the point that I became overprotective. I let my crazy stuff rub off on her and she ran to get away from me.

Moving forward, a I lay in the hospital from being sick, sick of my life, my lifestyle, the hatred I felt for all of the bad things that were done to me as a child, I asked

myself, “Do you want to live or you want to die?” I chose to live. I walked back into church and stayed seated for years and begin to learn new things that changed my stuff and learn new actions and words – like FORGIVE AND FORGIVENESS.

I had to face my own truth; I am talking about me here. I went through all of this as a child growing into a woman. And I am still healing from the pain. I am still forgiving.

I work with girls who challenge my stuff on a daily base, but I put the focus on nurturing them to help them. That’s how I handle or work with girls who challenge my stuff, by teaching them to handle their stuff. Sistahs, when you learn to handle your stuff, you can forgive and start loving one another and yourself.

I stand before you today sharing my story to help those of you with your own stories. Forgive!”⁷³

“As we think about forgiving those people who have hurt us in the past - it is not so much what we are thinking, but more so, what we are feeling about the past.”⁷⁴

The Sistahs were asked to reflect on their childhood memories, whether good, bad, funny or sad. The discussion followed on how those memories made them feel? Then they were asked, “Who do you need to forgive from your childhood?”

One Sistah brought up how her father kicked her out of his house at seventeen because she came in after 11:00 PM. She had to figure out where to go and how to survive in that moment for the rest of her life. “I was scared to death and angry as hell at my father. I never forgave him until I was grown and he was sick and dying.”

⁷³ Antoinette Davis, “Childhood Memories: Forgiving Our Past” (Lecture, Conversations at Tabitha’s Table, the St. Paul Community Baptist Church, Brooklyn, July 25, 2015).

⁷⁴ Michael Lapsley, “Healing of Memories Workshop” (Lecture, Pasadena, California, June 1, 2014).

Conversations about old boyfriends who took advantage of them, mothers who were battered by their intimate partners, drug use and abuse, molestation by family members and rape started to get thrown out on the floor.

One Sistah said, “Something must be wrong with me, because none of that stuff happened to me growing up...but my daddy did say I was too stubborn to do anything I didn’t want to do.” Today she is single, with no children and enjoying her retirement.

The Sistahs were encouraged to write a letter to the person they need to forgive during their devotional or journaling time, telling that person how they made them feel. Then at the end of the letter...forgive them. It is just three simple words that can open the doors to happiness: I forgive you. And wholeheartedly mean it. If doubt or negativity tries to creep into the process, just say like Jesus said, “Get behind me Satan.” Because that old demon knows what is happening – that is to become stronger in the Lord. There will be no need for Satan to try to bring in doubt; this is only about forgiveness which will bring new strength and freedom. This does not mean becoming best buddies again with the person or even let them back into your life. It is not about trusting them ever again, but more about trusting GOD. Forgiveness is for personal salvation, not for the offending party’s benefit. It is to free what is trapped deep inside trying to get out...it is releasing stress.

So, at this session the Sistahs at Tabitha’s Table spoke on forgiveness. With forgiveness comes peace and a sense of being made right with God. Some of the Sistahs admitted that there were some things that they could not forgive. Well, who said forgiveness is easy? It will take some work. They were asked to explore deep within

themselves how being angry with the person or their hatred towards that person made them feel.

One sistah admitted that every time she thought about the person her blood boiled. Tension and dis-ease builds up in the body when she thought about the person. There were quite possibly physiological changes taking place in her body that recreated within her the anxiety or “fight or flight” response she had originally felt. She will more than likely continue this reaction, which over time may manifest as disease in her body unless she forgives this person and moves on in her life.

It was reinforced with the women at the table that the more issues, people, and circumstances they could forgive, the more peace they would find. The more at ease versus the dis-ease they will become. Then they will have taken another major step in their healing journey.

Step 3 in the Process: Finding your Peace in Forgiveness of your Past

The Sistahs were instructed to think about something from their childhood memories that brought them peace and comfort during the bad times. It could be a nickname, words to a song, a picture, a game, or a TV show then figure out a way to creatively add this to the quilt.

All of the Sistahs elected to use a picture, especially since one Sistah offered to make photocopies of the pictures in color on fabric. They were to choose one picture that was of a childhood memory and the other was to either be people who they needed to forgive or something that was meaningful to them from childhood. The pictures ranged from old baby photos, to parents and grandparents. They tell more about why they selected the pictures in their stories. Most really seemed taken with the idea that their

picture could be put on the quilt. When asked why, one Sistah remarked, “Because the one I need to forgive the most is myself.”

The Inner Quilting Circle was not as vocal upon reflection. One commented, “I guess it’s because we all have some demons in our past we need to release.” Another remarked, “But when you finally do let them go it feels so good.”

Quilting Circle IV: I'm Not Your Super Woman, Or Am I?

“Harriett Tubman Pulled a Plow”

Recited by Gwendolyn Bathea

Harriett Tubman pulled a plow.
So what are you complainin' bout?
You have no reason to whine or doubt
Harriett did what had to be done
Because of her you can enjoy the sweetness of ethnicity and freedom
So bask in the intelligence of your God-given elegance
Enjoy the ebb and flow of life's refrain
Without an endless chorus of disdain
There is more who to plant and more room to grow
More time to harvest and more time to sow
Since Harriet cleared the way please don't stop now
Don't put an end the progress she started
When she struggled to pull that plow
Don't act like it's not your time to shine
With all that good Jones DNA provided by the Divine
It was her time then and it's your time now
Somebody's got to keep pulling that plow
It not really that bad
I know you can find some reason to get glad
Could it be the roof over your head?
Maybe it's the shoes on your feet
Or that good food you get to eat
The end of your rope is only in your mind
Tie a knot and hang on since life doesn't let you hit rewind
If you can't think of anything good just say hallelujah anyhow
Because you're the legacy of the woman who pulled the plow
Pull it when the gas bill's due
Pull it when friends don't see you through
Pull it when spirits are high but funds are low
Pull it when you're all dressed up with no place to go
Some things you have to go through not around
Going through is the only way we get to higher ground
The plow was made for such a time as this
Without it there are some opportunities you just might miss
Come ya'll don't hold back now
Take your rightful place...behind the plow.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Enna A. Bachelor, “Poem for the Homegoing Celebration for Cousin Kenneth Jones” (St. Cecilia Roman Catholic Church, Detroit, Michigan, June 18, 2008).

For the Sistahs at Tabitha's Table as women of color have had more than their share of life's harsh lessons. They have had to maintain an appearance of strength. Many of the women at the table had been told as young women by their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, godmother, and any other Black woman that made an impact on their life, "You got to be strong to survive as a Black woman." This meant being mentally, physically, and spiritually strong. It would be necessary to try to learn at an accelerated level and prove to be ten times smarter than whites in the educational system and work force.

Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, in *Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman*, declares:

To assert the idea of strong Black women during slavery, segregation, or contemporary institutional racism and intra-racial sexism is to maintain a reassuring conviction: that personal actions and agency trump all manner of social abuses. Therefore, the presence of "strong Black women" soothes many a conscience that could be troubled by the material conditions forced upon such persons and the toll of organized injustice on their humanity. In other words, strong Black women do not simply exist; they play critical roles in the societal imagination and in social life. It is therefore questionable whether we can afford to live without the reassurance, comfort and hard work they are invoked to provide.⁷⁶

Therefore, it would behoove the American culture to continue to perpetuate and support image of the Black woman as strong and independent. However, this illusion of strength is detrimental to the mental and physical health of Black women. There is a tendency to hide true feelings and emotional and health needs from others. But keeping up the appearance of invulnerability and strength has relational costs which compromise their physical and emotional wellness. The need to keep up appearances causes anxiety which leads to stress. Years of maintaining this stance leads to an accumulation of stress or dis-ease, eventually leading to physical and/or mental disease.

⁷⁶ Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, *Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman: Voice and the Embodiment of a Costly Performance* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 3.

Continually agreeing to numerous labor-intensive tasks, having no one in whom to confide, and suppressing emotions of doubt, anger, and frustration are regular dimensions of Black women's experience of strength.⁷⁷

As Black women in urban America, many within the quilting circle agree that they maintain the appearance of strength on the surface, but when they retreat to the privacy of their rooms, by themselves, they continue repress their feelings, thoughts, anxieties, doubts and fears, entombing them deep within, while feeling they are dead and buried. But like a corpse, it will rot and fester.

Another point of view was raised in discussion at the table was how the capitalistic structure in which they live has spent billions of dollars making sure African-American women are dissatisfied with their looks. This world causes them to be preoccupied with appearance, whether it be their physical features or the feeling that as women they can conquer the world. If they cannot maintain or achieve the goals of the status quo, there is a sense of failure, and the beginnings of depression set in. Black women often fail to see that the true beauty they possess is in their resilience and ability to get things done. It is my contention at times that the powers that be do this to keep Black women distressed and distracted. After all, the serpent did not tempt Eve because she was weak; for if she was weak, what would have been the benefit of his tempting her? He tempted her because she was strong, and knowing that she was the perfection of GOD's image and likeness, he had to bring her down in order to subdue and control her. And the world has made an industry of doing that ever since.

The fact of the matter is Black women have demonstrated their strength and resiliency throughout American History. Yet at the same time, they are gentle nurturers

⁷⁷ Ibid., 6.

of life. It is not what is on the outside that makes us strong or what the world says who or what we should be. It is what is on the inside, embedded in our DNA and what is in the history of our foremothers who survived through the Middle Passage and beyond that is a testimony to who Black women are in America.

Nonetheless, in today's world, African-American women are dying off faster from diseases that can be prevented if only they would stand up and take notice and recognize what we are: Powerful! For the Sistahs at the table, as African-American women, have to find the courage to look at the parts of their lives that have been retarding our growth and choices they have made in life. Black women must know that although they may or may not meet the requirements of the status quo for happiness, material wealth and well-being, they can still rest in the peace of knowing that we can be the women GOD called us to be. No matter what age we are, we can make changes for the betterment of our lives. And never think it is impossible to create our own standards of beauty and strength in this world. This is a message that Tabitha would have probably delivered to the women and widows that sat around her table, and this is the message that was given to the Sistahs who sit at Tabitha's Table today.

Yes they are superwomen, for they are still here. With or without men at their sides they have survived. We have managed to work three jobs, pay our bills, raise and love our children, walk these streets and still at the end of the day, praise GOD for giving them the strength to wake up and do it again tomorrow. My Sistahs at the table are resilient women. If it were not for you, where would men be? Remember GOD made the woman to be helpmates for them. When they can't do it, we make it happen.

The Sistahs at Tabitha's Table were asked to look inside themselves and reflect on who they know they should be; not how the world sees them, but how GOD sees them. What is that still small voice of the Spirit saying? Black woman who are you? And remember, if they ever think their life is hard...Harriett Tubman pulled a plow.

Tabitha Speaks: Alice -The Superwoman Syndrome

"I will praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

As Sistah Alice takes her seat in the center of the quilting circle, she reminds the women about the ideal woman of the Bible, who some would call a super woman: the Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31.

Most of you have heard about or studied the virtuous woman. Many of us strive to be like her. The definition of a virtuous woman is one having or showing high moral standards; "she considered herself very virtuous because she neither drank nor smoked." Synonyms for virtuous include: righteous, good, pure, whiter than white, saintly, angelic, moral, ethical, upright, upstanding, high-minded, principled, exemplary; law-abiding, irreproachable, blameless, guiltless, unimpeachable, immaculate, honest, honorable, reputable, laudable, decent, respectable, noble, worthy, meritorious;

Some of the key points from Proverbs 31 are:

- *She is strong by wisdom and grace, fears God*
- *She is a woman of spirit*
- *If she's married it's her business is to please her husband, to know his mind*
- *She accommodates herself to his temper, no crossing him, even if he is in a bad mood.*
- *She hates to sit still and do nothing*
- *She rises early while it's still night, make breakfast for her family and servants*

- *She works with her hands*
- *She a good manager, she considers a field and buys it, only if brings profit to the family, she does not run into debt*
- *She furnishes her house well and has good clothing for her and her family*
- *She opens her mouth with wisdom, love and kindness*
- *She serves the poor with her own hands and does it freely, cheerfully and generously*
- *She bears up under many crosses and disappointments*
- *Her children grow up in her place and call her blessed*
- *Her good works will praise her (similar to the widows giving praise to Tabitha, when they showed Peter the coats of garment Tabitha made for them and the poor . But does this woman truly exist? Or are most of you who sit in this circle like the Superwoman that Alicia Keys sings about. Listen and read along with the lyrics as I play the song:*

*“Everywhere I’m turning
 Nothing seems complete
 I stand up and I’m searching
 For the better part of me*

*I hang my head from sorrow
 State of humanity
 I wear it on my shoulders
 Gotta find the strength in me*

*‘Cause I am a Superwoman
 Yes I am, yes she is
 Still when I’m a mess, I still put on a vest
 With an S on my chest
 Oh yes, I’m a Superwoman . . .*

*Oh yeah, I’m tellin’ you
 I’m super, so super
 I’m super, so super
 Yes I am, yes we are
 Yes I am, yes you are.”⁷⁸*

⁷⁸ Linda Perry, Steve Mostery, and Alicia Augello-Cook, *Superwoman* (Sony Publishing, 2007).

A powerful song! How many women walk around day to day a total mess, ready to fall apart at any time, but they get it together, put an “S” on their chest walk out into the world and no one knows their hurt and pain? For example, those betrayed by loved ones in cases of domestic violence; primary support for the family or the mothers of young Black and Hispanic men killed by police or security forces.

Think of the mothers of:

- *Sean Bell*
- *Trayvon Martin*
- *Eric Garner*
- *Michael Brown*
- *Oscar Grant*

The list goes on; women carry many responsibilities upon her shoulders.

Exactly what is a Superwoman also known as Superwoman Syndrome? According to Dr. Madeline Ann Lewis:

These women are constantly striving to accomplish everything possible in a perfect manner, and have not learned to put themselves as top priority. They do not have the energy or time to devote to themselves or if they have the time they may consider themselves selfish to indulge in self-pampering or to simply provide themselves quiet time alone. The superwoman syndrome is a range of physical, psychological and interpersonal stress symptoms experienced by a woman who attempts to perform perfectly in multiple or conflicting roles or go overboard in one role. She keeps adding roles as if more is better or if not performing multiple roles she is stressed as result of handling just one role and obsessing to do it perfectly.

The superwoman is a good person, duty oriented, very responsible and truly desires to do what is right. She may feel powerless, guilty overwhelmed and inadequate. She carries a giant load in life and goes day to day in a semi depressed state due to her burdens. She is unhappy about

her situation, does not know how to lighten her load and may secretly resent others who have been able to escape their personal demands.⁷⁹

Alice goes on to address the Sistahs at the table: “*As Black women we learn to become superwoman when we are children. We learn to become the good little girl, who pleases everyone for attention. We begin to have the feeling that we must be able to do all, the inability to say no to others in order to have a feeling of accomplishment, but all the while having low self-esteem.*”

She then asked them to contemplate the following questions:

- *Do I feel the need to do it all?*
- *Do I compete against myself?*
- *Do I rarely say “no” to others?*
- *Do I take on more and more responsibility?*
- *Do I rarely feel a strong sense of accomplishment?*
- *Do I constantly feel overwhelmed?*
- *Do I feel the need to be the perfect mother/wife/daughter?*
- *Do I want to be everything to everyone?*

If they answered yes to these questions, or even half of them, they are suffering from Superwoman Syndrome.

Alice goes on to offer tips to the women in the quilting circle tips to help release them from the Superwoman Syndrome. “*First of all, keep life simple. Write a mission statement, write down everything that is vital to obtaining your lifetime goal; list areas of your life that you do not need to be done or can be let go. Begin a new game plan. Write this plan as if you are writing for a friend. Watch for time wasters.*

Second, learn to say no, often and without guilt. Be willing to say no when necessary. Then reward yourself for your new behavior.

⁷⁹ Madeline Ann Lewis, “Overcoming the Super Woman Syndrome,” *SelfHelp.Com*, http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/overcoming_superwoman_syndrome.html (accessed February 2, 2016).

Learn to live with the “needs” and do not complicate life with the wants. We tend to clutter our lives with our wants and get overwhelmed when we cannot meet our needs because the wants have exhausted our resources.

Pay attention to each day, allow some quiet private time. Spend time looking or going outside, pay attention to the “now.” It is alright to regulate the number of items on your to do list. It is better to accomplish one or two things on a limited list, than have a list of twenty things to do and get overwhelmed and accomplish none.

Do not be afraid to ask for help when you need it. Remember, it is alright to delegate whenever possible.

Post reminders or positive affirmations at home on the mirror. And always remember to give thanks for small or large victories. Again keep everything simple and LEARN TO SAY NO, without explanation!

Lastly, do you have a sanctuary? I look up the super hero’s Superwoman and Superman; Superwoman did not have a sanctuary, but Superman had a secret Sanctuary call Fortress of Solitude. Fortress of Solitude was a placed that he could relax and work undisturbed; also the King or husband in Proverbs 31, the virtuous woman made his home a sanctuary, so when he got home, all he had to do was relax and not worry about anything. Where was the virtuous woman sanctuary? When did she have time for herself? As women, we feel guilty if we decide to do a day of pampering for ourselves, we feel it may be selfish to take away from the budget or just spend time with ourselves.

*Ladies let's take care of ourselves, as stated above Dr. Lewis advises us to allow some private time and give thanks for large or small victories that we achieve in reaching our goal. Any comments?"*⁸⁰

Alice goes on to play the last song *I'm Not Your Superwoman* by Gladys Knight, Patti Labelle and Dionne Warwick:

Early in the morning I put breakfast at your table
And make sure that your coffee has its sugar and cream
Your eggs are over easy
Your toast unlikely
All that's missing is your morning kiss that used to greet me
Now you say the juice is sour
It used to be so sweet
And I can't help but to wonder if you're talking about me
We don't talk the way we used to talk
It's hurting so deep
I've got my pride
I will not cry
But it's making me weak
[Chorus:]
I'm not your superwoman
I'm not the kind of girl
That you can let down
And think that everything is okay
Boy I am only human
This girl needs more than occasional hugs⁸¹
As a token of love from you to me . . .

The Sistahs in the circle sit quietly at the table, some singing, some with tears in their eyes. The feeling in the room was one of deep reflection. No one spoke after Alice. They just sang and dried their tears, preparing for the next step in their journey towards healing at Tabitha's Table.

⁸⁰ Alice Blackmon, "The Superwoman Syndrome" (Lecture, Conversations at Tabitha's Table, The St. Paul Community Baptist Church, Brooklyn, NY, August 8, 2015).

⁸¹ LA Reid, Babyface, and Daryl Simms, *I'm not your Superwoman*, Gladys Knight, Dionne Warwick, Patti LaBelle, (MCA, 1991).

The Process: Self Portrait

The Sistahs were instructed to draw a picture of themselves in the *Imago Dei*, the image and likeness of GOD. They were to focus on the image of how they felt GOD, not humans, wanted to see them. The same process used for placing the flowers was done for this step. Sistahs needed a pattern for this step because only a few felt comfortable drawing it freehand, so images or silhouettes were taken from images of African American women from the web.

At this step of the process, the Sistahs became very vocal. They started naming out who they felt God saw them to be. One said, “I am an African queen.” Another described herself as a butterfly. There was a dancer, a healer, a woman illuminated by the sun. Then they were told to dress their images, add hair, and embellish them with jewels. It was as if there was a room full of little girls making paper dolls. They were sharing fabric, giving each other tips on how to do the hair, and there were loads of laughter and jokes as one Sistah commented that God sees her naked, and she used two flat stones to create breasts. The tension in the room had lightened up tremendously; no one felt uptight or stressed. They all said how relaxing and much fun they were having as they started to feel the Spirit of creativity and see their stories unfold through their work.

The Inner Circle once again met to evaluate and reflect on the process. One of the issues that came to the table was the fact that when we arrived, there were no tables in the room and we had to search all over the church for tables. This caused the class to start almost an hour late. In addition to that, we were in a space that had been portioned off. On the other side, they were teaching discipleship class and the men kept coming in telling us we were too loud. I did explain to them that this was an interactive class and the talking could not be helped. The problem was that the “safe space” had been broken. A

session where it would have been beneficial for the Sistahs to speak out and share had been tainted. Also, we were cramped together in half a room with only three tables for sixteen women. Once the class on the other side was finished, we opened up the partition and broke freely. I spoke later with the building manager to make sure that this situation never happened again.

Despite the space issue, once the Sistahs were able to spread out, all went well. They were able to breathe and created some of the beautiful images that will be presented in the next chapter. The following week, the women came back with their images fully dressed, one with eyelashes, others with real hair – styled, and some had taken the initiative to embroider around their images and showed the other Sistahs how to do the same . . . now that's Sistahology.

Quilting Circle V: Tell the Whole Truth

Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped.

And Jesus said, "Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from ME."

Now when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling and falling down before Him, she declared to Him in the presence of all the people the reason she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately.

And He said to her, "Daughter be of good cheer, your faith has made you well. Go in peace." Luke 8:43-48 (NKJV)

In Luke 8:40-48, when Jesus returns to Galilee, Jarius, one of the synagogue rulers, fell at his feet begging him to come and heal his dying daughter. He is surrounded by a large crowd. Now here comes this woman, who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years. Under Levitical law, this woman was unclean and therefore an outcast. Imagine the

abuse she must have suffered. Who was she? Was she someone's wife, daughter or mother? The Scriptures talk of a physical bleeding, the cause is unknown . . . it could have been an irregular menstrual cycle, fibroids, endometriosis, or complications after childbirth, emotional stress or trauma.

Quilting Circle V at Tabitha's Table dealt with truth-telling. Many sisters are suffering from severe anemia not so much from the physical but from us spiritually bleeding out. Black women are hemorrhaging from issues with their relationships: relationships with their children, men, friends, jobs, their health, the church, their faith and most of all themselves.

The women at the table agreed that some of their major hurts and pains in life come as a result of issues of their wombs. By that I mean, a woman's womb is the gateway for love. It is where we receive our men and bring forth our children. If you ask any of the women at the table what hurts her the most, it is usually a bleeding relationship between one of the two. Human beings, especially women, are creatures of relationships. Good relationships affirm them, while bad relationships drain them of their life force. Women will talk to and get advice from other women who are bleeding just as bad as they are. However, if a woman really wants healing she can take it to Jesus, reach out in faith and touch the hem of his garment. Then tell the whole truth.

The scripture states, "Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering." The minute the woman with the issue of blood turned her problem of spiritual and physical draining over to Jesus, she was freed from her suffering. This can also be the case with the women who are sitting in the circle as well. Some would say, "I did that and it didn't work." Well maybe it didn't work because

one key point was left out that must be done. For the scripture states clearly, that she fell at his feet and declared before Him and all of the people why she had touched him . . . she told WHOLE TRUTH. According to bell hooks, “Healing takes place within us as we speak the truth of our lives . . . Commitment to truth-telling is thus the first step in any process of self-recovery.”⁸² Jesus can affirm you, but you have got to reaffirm yourself. It was emphasized to the women that they had to be honest with themselves and reflect on what role they were playing in their own hemorrhaging.

The word WHOLE leaves nothing out. Whole truth means not repeating what somebody else told them to say, or what sounds good, leaving out their own voice. I proposed to them that the whole truth means the need for oneness of their bodies, minds and souls, oneness in their relationships, telling of their helplessness, powerlessness, great pain and being real about how they got there. It means putting themselves back together, not allowing their true self to be split apart by their history, by a man, a child or another woman, or a world that is systematically designed to oppress and depress. It means reclaiming their body as good; as a creation of God, made in God’s image and likeness. Their bodies are the temples of God on this earth and the gateway that brings life into this world, and truth be told, you cannot let just any man enter your temple. Whole truth means that it is time for honesty and mutuality in human relationships – no more games. Whole truth means confronting issues of sexist attitudes and issues head-on as well as other institutional sins, like racism, war, poverty, and the structures that perpetuate them.

⁸² bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam*, 11.

The WHOLE TRUTH is that they are entitled as a child of God to a full and fruitful human experience, free from oppression, for Jesus has affirmed them as daughters of God and has set you free from any obstacle that has been thrown at you. For the Bible says in John 8:31, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Now it is time to reaffirm this for themselves.

It is by faith that Jesus affirms their healing. When they take their problems, drama, messed up relationships (that should be left alone anyway), that daughter who just won’t do right, that son that keeps hanging with the wrong crowd, that boss who won’t get off their back; when they can drop down at the Master’s feet and tell the WHOLE truth, not to Jesus, because He already knows the truth, but to themselves, then they can be fully healed. God knows you inside and out, your comings and your goings. As women, it is up to them to face their whole truth and reaffirm the truth! Let the whole truth be heard, be healed, and then and only then can you go on to heal others, because Jesus says, greater works than this shall you do...it is time for the sisters to heal so we can start to heal their families and communities. So at Tabitha’s Table, the truth must be told for healing to begin.

Tabitha Speaks: Dr. Rita - Recognizing ourselves Sistah to Sistah

YOU ARE ME AND I AM YOU

Poem recited by Dr. Rita

Every day as I walk through the aisles of a supermarket, department store or even the parking lot, I see you...I mean me.

Some days you are tall with golden skin and long dark hair or short and stout with shoulder length locks but, always focused and strong; guarded against me.

You don't see me....or do you....as you pass me, determined not to make eye contact.

What happened...what have I done to you...I mean me?

Why can't you look at me...I mean you...and simply say "Hi"?

Did I inadvertently date your man without knowing he was involved with you?

Did I mistakenly sit in your usual seat at church? Or ignored your need for attention?

Did I embarrassed you with an unkind word or in some way belittled your attire?

What happened...what have I done to you...I mean me?

Did I cancel all of the good Black sitcoms that we...I mean you use to enjoy watching?

Did I tell good Black men to turn their backs on you and begin to date only white women?

Did I befriend your best friend and now she doesn't call you anymore?

Did I attack you in a public restaurant because I saw you having dinner with a white man?

What happened...what have I done to you...I mean me?

Well, if I haven't done anything to you...I mean me, then why can't you make eye contact with me?

Why won't you acknowledge you...I mean me?

Why can't you see that I am as disappointed and frustrated with what is happening to our community?

Don't you understand that I am you and you are me?

When can we be we...you know kind and supportive to each other?

And I don't mean just during holidays. Hell, last Xmas you still ignored you...I mean me!

In all our glory, length of hair and shades of beauty...I need you...I mean me.

Our community, families, schools and economic situation will never collectively improve if we can't make eye contact and start with "Hi". I need your support and encouragement;

So, the next time we pass one another in the supermarket, department store or parking lot, please don't look away; instead, turn to me...I mean we, look me in the eye and just say "Hi".

(Author Unknown Revisions by Rita Strickland 8/2015)

As Black women living in urban communities, we often fail to realize that as different as we may seem one another, we are quite the same. We may not share the same stories, but we will share similar stories. And we definitely will share the same truth. The truth of having gone through some stuff...whatever that stuff is. And when we start to tell our truths to one another, we discover, "I am you ... "

Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote a poem, "We Wear the Mask," (Appendix I). It speaks of how we wear a mask every day of our lives and cover up our true selves. We cover up our truth because it is painful. We do not want others to see our pain. So we wear a mask to shield our true selves from others. When in fact whatever trouble I may be masking, you could be masking too. It is time to remove the mask.



THE EXERCISE: REMOVING THE MASK

1. *Each Sistah at the table will receive a mask. The eyes are covered because sometimes even with our eyes wide open, we remain blind to some of our issues.*
2. *Each Sistah at the table will have an opportunity to reveal a hidden or unwanted burden - revealing your issues allows for release and opens the door to healing.*
3. *Then speak an affirming or positive word to yourself about your truth. Now remove the mask.*
4. *Sum up the session with the ABC of Truth and the acrostic.*

ABC of Truth

- *Accept that speaking truth can be hurtful but it is healing pain.*
- *Be open and honest with yourself.*
- *Create a mind-set that allows your spirit to speak through you.*

TRUTH

- *Trusting in the Lord with all your heart and all your might.*
- *Realizing that the burdens you carry can be released.*
- *Understanding that truth is healing.*
- *Transforming your mind, body and spirit can be realized.*
- *Helping others to discover their truth is beneficial as well.”⁸³*

Created by Dr. Rita Strickland 8/6/15

This Quilting Circle was a breakthrough session. As the Sistahs went around the circle, with mask covering their faces, truths were revealed, and tears began to flow. No one could really tell who was talking because our faces were covered by the mask. Dr. Rita started off by revealing that she always felt sad because she never had any children of her own, but she came to the realization that her nieces had become her children after the death of her sister. Another Sistah revealed how she felt inadequate as a mother because her son was in jail, but the truth was she did the best she could do to raise him. He had chosen his own path. There were stories of feeling inferior because of the darker complexions, abusive spouses, unaccepting parents, and the need to find peace in this world. One Sistah was crying so hard she could not be understood. The tears were flowing like a river. However, when all of the masks were removed and we all had time to compose ourselves, Sistahs were commenting that it felt like weights had been lifted from their shoulders. There was release – freeing within their mind, bodies and souls. Several Sistahs confessed that these were truths that they had been holding in for years.

⁸³ Rita Strickland, “Recognizing ourselves Sistah to Sistah” (Lecture, Conversations at Tabitha’s Table the St. Paul Community Baptist Church, August 8, 2015).

And it was here sitting among the women at Tabitha's Table they were finally able to release them. It is one of the most joyous feelings to have that gives freedom from within – to tell the whole truth. One of the major ways to combat Cumulative Lifetime Stress is to simply remove the mask and tell the whole truth.

I then recited this poem by Geraldine Tamayo:

I Thank You

You kept it real
You told no lies
I trusted your words
And you said that it was okay to cry
Hidden from an ocean of lies from the
people closest to me....
But you, you revealed them all
you answered questions never asked
and you showed no regret
and with that I Thank You!
Wishing the truth were lies
expecting a laugh and you telling me
that it was all a
Joke!
The truth hit me, then stabbed me, then
killed me a thousand
Times....
I cried that night with the never ending
thought of the truth....
I thought I knew my life I thought I
understood it all....
But you opened my eyes and unwrapped
the hurtful truth....
And I thank you for being there, to hold
my hand....through it all....
And I can never thank you enough for
opening the closet of Skeletons....⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Geraldine J. Tamayo, "I Thank You," *Family Friend Poems*, <http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/the-truth-hurts#ixzz3YGWR0JFv> (accessed February 5, 2015).

The Process: Creating your pocket of Truth

Now that they had revealed their truths, removed their mask and dried their tears it was time to move on to the next phase in the process. A pocket of truth was added to the quilt and each Sistah was to write the one word of power that she gained from speaking her truth. Words like peace, love, courage, faith and beauty were some of the themes that graced their quilts.

Once the quilt was finished, the Sistahs were told they should hang it in their prayer closet, upper room, altar, or wherever they meditate or pray. When they knew there was a truth they needed to reveal and affirm to themselves, write it down and place it in the pocket of truth and pray on it. The truth will start to be easier to reveal, and the truth will set them free.

By giving up the illusory power that comes from lying and manipulation and opting instead for the personal power and dignity that comes from being honest, Black women can begin to eliminate life-threatening pain from our lives.⁸⁵

Truth telling is about taking the scraps of fabric of our lives, like the broken pieces of our hearts and mending them back together again. It is about *being made whole*. This is what the Inner Circle concluded in our evaluation of the day.

Quilting Circle VI: The Women Must Gather

As mentioned in the introduction to this project, as well as during Mother Sarah's conversation, the women need to gather. The women should gather in order to share information that they otherwise may not gain except from another woman. Often it is said, usually by men that Black women cannot get along, this just sets Black women up for separation from the ties that bind them as sisters. They are not giving a solution, but

⁸⁵ hooks, *Sisters of the Yam*, 19.

adding to the problem. How you may ask? Because women are listening to that nonsense. Often women are in competition for male attention, born and raised to believe that they are here just for them, even if what they say hurts the bond of sisterhood. In reality, Black women can get along. Just look at the history of Black sororities, business organizations, church groups and political and social organizations in this country.

Media is great at creating competition among women. Look at the models in magazines. Slim and trim, perfect skin, hair and body. So youthful and beautiful. How can I be like her? Comedian Monique says it best: “I hate skinny bitches!” That is one of the attitudes that they want Black women to embrace so they will spend all of our time, energy and most of all our money to achieve a look that is not even in our DNA structure. When women develop this false need to look like *her*, they have failed to realize that she does not even look that way in real life. She is really a 15/16 year old child or has been airbrushed to the extremes. Yet, women will throw off their metabolism with fad diets and diet pills or spend a fortune on hair weaves to try to compete. They will separate themselves from their sisters in imaginary competition against a picture of perfection which is really the picture of a child.

I am not advocating not being healthy; after all, this is about our healing, physically and spiritually. But do you ever wonder why Weight Watchers and exercise programs are done in a group work? Because of the relationships. Relationships provide support. Support makes participants feel, “you are not alone.” That is why our relationship with God is so important: We know we are not alone.

According to Nathan Mitchell:

Gathering together is a basic act of humanness. While the rituals themselves may vary enormously – in intensity and duration, in social

significance and cultural origins, in communal meaning and personal adherence – their presence marks our relationships as distinctively human.⁸⁶

When women remain disconnected from one another, they are detached from the relationships that make them a part of the body of humanity. When they are not in relationship with one another, separated from the body, their minds and spirits become disconnected as well. It is essential for women to reconnect or they may possibly become dysfunctional. This was the whole premise behind *Willie Lynch: The Making of a Slave*: divide and conquer.

The same rings true for the sistah-hood among Black women who sit at Tabitha's Table. It reminds them, as they sit and stitch the pieces of fabrics together, that no matter what they are going through, they are unified in their struggle. They are never alone, for there is always an angel sent by God to stand by you, if you let her. So the women gather, to laugh, to cry, to act silly, to get serious, to alleviate stress, to heal one another so that they can heal our community, and the world.

Tabitha Speaks: Carla – It's Time to get back to Woman Business

Why do we gather? In the Bible the women gathered to take care of each other. Birthing babies teaching how to care for themselves (menstruation, other women problems). The women took care of the homes while the men went out to hunt and or do the herding the cattle.

Not only did they gather for work, they also gathered in times of death to mourn as a collective. Jeremiah 9: 17--21 states:

⁸⁶ Mitchell, "Mystery and Manners," 164-73.

*This is what the LORD Almighty says:
“Consider now! Call for the wailing women to come;
Send for the most skillful of them.
Let them come quickly and wail over us till our eyes overflow with tears
And water streams from our eyelids.
The sound of wailing is heard from Zion:
‘How ruined we are!
How great is our shame!
We must leave our land
Because our houses are in ruins.’”
Now, you women, hear the word of the LORD ;
Open your ears to the words of his mouth.
Teach your daughters how to wail;
Teach one another a lament.
Death has climbed in through our windows
And has entered our fortresses; it has removed the children from the streets
And the young men from the public squares.”*

*Not only did they gather to mourn and wail but also to celebrate the escape from
enemies as in Exodus 15:19--21:*

*When Pharaoh’s horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the
LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites
walked through the sea on dry ground. Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s
sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with
timbrels and dancing. Miriam sang to them:*

*“Sing to the LORD,
For he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver
He has hurled into the sea.”*

Or to celebrate the victory in war like 1 Samuel 18:67:

*When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine,
the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with
singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres.*

*Women gathered to take care of one another, as in Exodus 1:17. The midwives
Shiprah and Puah did not only birth the babies they helped, nurtured and sustained
them as well as their mothers. Before each birth they prayed for the health and wellness
of the babies. They looked after the mothers before and after the birth of the baby. Their*

teachings and works have been handed down from ancient midwives to the modern day Doula.

Ruth never left Naomi and Naomi counseled Ruth on how to get Boaz, (Ruth 3). Elizabeth took in Mary, (Luke 1:36-56). Martha and Mary were sisters. Martha the older of the two may have been married at some point and her husband may have died. She took care of her sister Mary.

The women gathered on the road to Calvary to weep and wail as Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ made his way to death on the cross. Followed his body to the tomb and then returned three days later to find it empty and be the first to hear the Good News of the Gospels, (Luke 23-24).

It's time for us to get back to Women business!

I know as women we have male friends, some of us prefer to hang out with males more so than females. I use to say, "men make better friends: no drama." That's ok but you have to pick the right set of men to hang out with. In my experience I thought, my male friend and I were cool, hanging out working together, eating together, and going out drinking. It was all good until I met my future husband, that's when my brother/friend, told me how he felt. He was in love with me and how could I chose another man over him...hummm. It's cool to have male friends it keeps balance in your life. You can't talk to a brother about everything. Men don't always want to hear about our "female issues".

When you have a circle of Sistahs, on the other hand, who you trust, you can speak about anything and everything. No I'm not saying to trust everybody with your

business, but as women we have a commonality. And there are some things we can share with each other and some things I will only tell my best friends.

Sistahs we have to get back to Woman Business!

If you are willing, open up your mind and your heart, spirit will guide you to Women's gatherings. Women gather all over the world for different types of reasons, like to exercise, quilt, cook, do arts and crafts. And in these sessions we learn about others types of things from birthing children, to better daycare, to getting a better job or school. We can learn from each other and teach one another.

WE have sat and cried, laughed and told our stories.

WE have exchanged flowers looked at silhouettes and listened to life stories, we learned its okay to "Tell the Truth".

"Am I your Superwoman"?

WE shared our fabric and the stories of our lives

Like my quilts has some pieces that your quilt has when this workshop ends so will my life, have a piece of your life's fabric.

*WE have learned and shared a lot at Tabitha's Table.*⁸⁷

Framing the Quilt: Reframing your Life

Now that the women at Tabitha's Table have gathered together the different fabrics of their lives, let's re-examine what steps in the process have been completed:

1. They identified the color of their pain and turned it to the color of joy through learning to dye our own background fabric.
2. They identified the presence of God in their lives by recognizing God's beauty in nature through a biblical flower applique.

⁸⁷ Carla Gittens, "It's Time to get back to Woman Business" (Lecture at Conversations at Tabitha's Table, The St. Paul Community Baptist Church, August 22, 2016).

3. They have recalled childhood memories, some hurt and some were happy, but all were necessary for what God has called them to do in this life by adding a picture of our fondest childhood memory.
4. They addressed the question of “I’m not your super woman, or am I?” by creating an image of themselves in the eyes of God.
5. They told the whole truth about their innermost secrete and discovered the lesson they had to learn from it and made a pocket of truth.

This is now the final phase of constructing the quilt top. They are now ready to frame or put the borders on their stories. A border is a strip or strips of fabric that frame the edges of the quilt. It is like a picture frame. Borders can be wide or narrow, pieced or appliqued, or a combination of techniques. For the sake of simplicity we did a two strip border. Fabrics were used that complemented the elements in the quilt rather than clash with it or makes it look too disorganized. This can apply to life as well. In order to de-stress ourselves, we sometimes must look for what compliments our lives rather than what conflicts with it and causes anxiety and confusion. I guess you can say a border is like framing your life in the proper perspective.

As the Sistahs cut, sat and stitched their borders, they broke off into one-on-one conversations with one another. The beauty of this was that many of the women did not really know one another personally. Most were just familiar with each other as church members. But this Circle of Sistahs had visibly grown closer. All volunteered to help Mother Colisa, the coordinator of the church artisans, make cotton plants from coat hangers for the upcoming Commemoration of the Maafa in September. Everyone knew one another by name, not just by face. Other women were coming to me and the

coordinator of Women's Ministry asking if Conversations at Tabitha's Table was going to be repeated, because they heard so much about it and wanted to join. The feedback that the Inner Circle was getting was positive. And all of the women at the table were smiling. I wondered to myself, "Is this how Tabitha felt?"

Quilting Circle VII: Tabitha Arise!

And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there. They sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them.

Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

But Peter put them all out, and knelt down prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.

Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. (Acts 9: 38-43, NIV)

The women at Tabitha's Table Quilting Circle embarked upon a journey of self-discovery. They learned that no matter what they had been through, the love of God saturates every fiber of their lives. The power of the Holy Spirit is always present to guide and protect them and show them new and creative means to get through life. They know that no matter how close they get to the preverbal "edge of the cliff," they will never fall. And if by chance they do, the Hand of God is always there to catch them. But if they do hit the bottom, God's power can lift them up, dust them off and set them back on their path.

They discover the love of God is present within them through the presence of the Spirit that dwells within their hearts. There is no situation that they cannot overcome when God is watching over them and Jesus is deep within their hearts. The Power of the

Holy Spirit will always guide and help them to creatively find a way to make it through any circumstance. The Sistahs at the table learned to innovatively de-stress themselves by choosing to create rather than self-destruct. It is as simple as changing your thoughts about a situation from negative to positive.

Martina Schnetz author of *The Healing Flow: Artistic Expression in Therapy* writes:

We are mind, body, and spirit and the songs of our being need to resonate with the physical, social, psychological, and spiritual realm in order for us to create the rich fabric of life. Each part needs to be in a continuous dialogical process with the other parts and with the greater whole. The waves of life must flow together to create the complex and beautiful tapestry of life. Balance and harmony include light and dark, the stormy sea and the peaceful waters. All are part of the greater web of being. The contemplative, interpretative dialogical process that art can provide is one way we may connect with and validate this healing, self-creating force within us...The symbolic realm of the image-making process can provide avenues through which we can get in touch with the greater whole and restore internal and external balance.⁸⁸

Being creative can make you feel better about your surroundings. Creating beauty in your world combats and eradicates anger and hopelessness. It can breathe new life into dying hopes. A sense of comfort and safety while creating begins to settle within because it is really the God in you that is at work. (Remember you are after all created in God's image and likeness.) You are always protected and directed through the Power of Divine Love that God has for you. God's love dwells in you abundantly, and you are able to give that love back to the world, in spite of all of the "isms," criticism, and let downs,

⁸⁸ Martina Schnetz, *The Healing Flow: Artistic Expression in Therapy* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2004), 22, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10082320> (accessed March 3, 2016).

meltdowns or emotional break downs. “And my love is too courageous to have it thrown back in my face.”⁸⁹

I contend that the story of Tabitha is not just about one woman. It is a story about the resurrection of all women. Tabitha could not possibly do all of the work that was necessary for the early church alone. If she did, that is probably what killed her. She needed the help all of the women, working together to care for the church, just as I needed the Inner Circle of Sistahs and the Sistahs who sat around Tabitha’s Table to complete this project.

It was not so much that women like Tabitha must be left to work alone; it is about resurrecting the spirit of Tabitha in the women to arise and help others as they help themselves. The women who came to the table became a new creation and left with a new creation. They discovered more about themselves and each other. It was not an individual that was resurrected but a group of women who bonded in sisterhood to share in a journey towards healing.

Now it is time to close this circle and prepare for the next. The Sistahs were upset that it was the final class and were planning to meet to finish their quilts together. Some asked if they could be the voice of Tabitha for the next Quilting Circle. They were all marveling over the work each one of them had done. I marveled over their resurrection and the renewal of the Spirit of Creativity that was in them. They all smiled and glowed as I had never seen in them before.

⁸⁹ Tyler Perry, *For Colored Girls* (Hollywood, CA: Lions gate Films DVD, 2010).

Ending the process: Reconnecting the Fabrics of our Lives - Quilting

The final step in the process was to quilt. Three layers of fabric are sewn or tied together. The top layer, which is usually the decorative or pieced layer, the middle which is usually a heavy cotton or batting, and the bottom layer or back piece which can be pieced together or a solid piece of fabric. If you look at it metaphorically, the top layer is what we always present to people – it is what they see. The middle layer is what is really going on inside of us. The middle or batting is what really keeps you warm. The bottom layer is foundation fabric which everything is stitched to . . . I guess you can call it the story behind the story. These three layers are held together with ties which are also called knots or stitches. They are the three layers that make up the quilt, just like the three layers that make up the fibers of our lives: What people see, what is going on inside of us, and what is behind it all. And when we connect them all together, taking time to make sure that the pieces on the quilt top are carefully sewn together, the middle layer is warm and comfortable, and the back layer is soft and not frayed, we have formed a new creation – a thing of beauty that can bring comfort to all who encounter it.

The finishing process is simply reconnecting the fibers of our lives.

Tabitha Arise

By Pamela D. Jones

Tabitha arise,

Because you are at the dawning of a new day. A new day full of new and exciting possibilities.

Tabitha arise,

For you are a pillar of your community – so strong that you cannot be toppled off of your base.

Tabitha arise,

For you are a trailblazer, a gazelle that can climb any mountain with perseverance and grace.

Tabitha arise,

For you are loved – you are love. You are beautiful – you create beauty wherever you go.

Tabitha arise,

For you are the leader, the Wise Woman, the designer and creator. You are the midwife who helps to deliver us when we are still pregnant with the possibilities in our life. You are the healer that can cure this world of all dis-ease and bring comfort to GOD's people.

Tabitha arise,

For you are the mother, the sistah, the teacher and the friend to all.

Tabitha arise,

Your work is not through, because the community of GOD is in need of you. You have a garden to tend, souls to help mend. You are the one chosen to reconnect the fabrics of our lives into a quilt of comfort, warmth and security.

Tabitha arise,

For it is a new day dawning,

A day when we will see the river of life proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river will be the tree of life, which bears twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month...and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. And we shall see GOD's face.

Tabitha. Arise!

CHAPTER 6: EVALUATION THE SISTAH'S AT TABITHA'S TABLE SPEAK

During Quilting Circle VII it was announced that the next session would be the last. The Sistahs were not happy about this. So, instead of making the final session evaluation, it was decided by the Inner Circle that we should all go out to lunch after the 11:00 AM church service the following Sunday for evaluation, celebration, and fellowship. Eleven women attended out of the fourteen women that completed quilts. We met at the Lindenwood Diner, a restaurant frequented by many of the members of St. Paul after service.

First the women were given the Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory. This assessment tool was developed in 1967 by Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe to determine the probability that stressful events in an individual's life over a two year period could be a predictor of mental or physical breakdown that would eventually manifest as disease. "Each event, called a Life Change Unit (LCU), had a different "weight" for stress. The more events the patient added up, the higher the score. The higher the score, and the larger the weight of each event, the more likely the patient was to become ill."⁹⁰ By taking this the Sistahs could see if their health was at risk due to stress. I administered this prior to giving the evaluation sheet because I wanted them to

⁹⁰ Mind Tools: Essential Skills for an Excellent Career, https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_82.htm (accessed January 19, 2016).

see the importance of the need for them to have some form of respite from the anxiety and tension in their lives (Appendix F).

The average score for the group was 190 points, indicating four participants having scores less than 150 who had a relatively low amount of life change and a low susceptibility to stress-induced health breakdown. Over half of the participants had scores of 150 to 300 indicating about a 50% chance of a major health breakdown in the next two years. One participant scored greater than 300 which indicated about an 80% likelihood of health breakdown in the next two years.⁹¹

Next, they were given the evaluation for the workshop. There were 12 questions they were to answer. All of the Sistahs felt that the workshop did bring out the Creative Spirit in them. This workshop was beneficial in helping to communicate better with women. It taught them to listen and be more nurturing and concerned about other women's issue and how to define their own. They learned that women really can get along. By participating in the workshops many felt much lighter when they left. They also found working on their quilts at home relaxing. It allowed them to calm down and refocus their thoughts away from their problems. They learned through biblical engagement to pray more and study the Bible. It strengthened their relationships with other women. All were in agreement that the Tabitha's Table should continue. They enjoyed the use of African American literature and found it gave clarity to feeling and their lives. Some felt the sessions should be longer. Many said they would like to be facilitators for the next Conversations at Tabitha's Table.

⁹¹ Ibid.

One Sistah felt that she had no stress in her life. Ironically, she suffers from chronic heart and lung disease. Although she attended all the sessions, she did not complete a quilt. Another suggested that quilting instructions be written down or a workbook be developed so that if a session is missed, the information on the next step can still be received. The Sistahs could not wait to pull out their quilts to show the progress they had made. They were filled with pride from the work they had done. They made arrangements to meet on their own to finish working or catching up on their work on the quilts.

At the final session, Quilting Circle VIII they told their own stories. The Spirit of Tabitha had been resurrected, and now they tell their stories.

Dawn Speaks



My name is Dawn Ammons. I am 56 years old. I have a daughter 30 years old. I work for the City of New York as a staff Analyst. I have been working for New York City since 2003. I am also the one in my family who tends to the old and the sick. Being the oldest child of three, there have been a lot of responsibilities I had

when growing up. My mother was a Lay Leader and Youth Leader at the church that I grew up in, Park Slope United Methodist Church. My father worked at RCA and then became an entrepreneur and opened up a hair salon. He had to give it up because of his failing eyesight.

The lessons that I learned from my parents were many. One main lesson was to do your job to the best of our abilities and that God can make a way out of no way. I became a single mom when my daughter was three years old. Her father and I split amicably and shared in the responsibility of raising her. She knows her mother and father's relatives and has been active in both families. I must say that it takes a village to raise a child and I would be wrong to say that I alone am responsible to rearing her. She is now a beautiful responsible adult, who helped me along with my sisters to take care [of] my mom, a diabetic, when she had her leg amputated in 2008. Diabetes runs in my family and now I am insulin dependent.

My father passed away in 1982, mom died in 2013. Our family really misses them because they were very active in encouraging my relatives and always lending a helping

hand when necessary. As stated earlier I took care of my great aunt, my grandfather and my grand uncle, making sure they received the care needed and arranged all of the funerals. I have also taken care of my daughter's Godmother who passed away in 1996.

My sisters and I all graduated from college and have good jobs. I have worked in three different industries, Banking, Hospital Photography, Darkroom photography and now my current job with the city. I have gained a lot of skills when dealing with people. I learned from my parents that education is important. I used my college degree for the Bank job and then went back to school to study photography. When I got laid off from the Darkroom job I went to work for NYC using my college degree.

I am now planning to retire from the City but I am now enrolled in classes to become a Licensed Massage Therapist. During my years at the various positions that I held, co-workers, family, and friends have reached out to me for advice and help for various situations. I have been able to console and offer advice on a variety of situations. My goal now is to be able to not only help people feel better with the advice I give but to also make people feel physically better.

I attend St. Paul Community Baptist Church. My paternal great-grandmother and her children were members. My father joined the church in the late 70s. I started attending when my mom's leg was amputated in 2008. The services are always a comfort to me. They got me through a lot of bad days and kept my spirit lifted.

The quilt that I made in the Tabitha Table workshop helped me to focus on myself and relieve a lot of stress from everyday living. I liked working with the other women because we all have similar problems and it helps that you know that you are not alone. I am planning to do another quilt because I feel very relaxed when working on a project

which will be an object of beauty when I finish. The image of myself is dressed in white. That is because God sees me as a healer. I chose to use the color blue in my background because it is a peaceful and serene color. A peaceful and serene place is where I want to be when times are hard. I put purple in it because it signifies royalty, and I am the queen of my domain.



Hilary Speaks

My quilt was born up out of my love for beauty and how it makes me feel. My colors were chosen not from the list of poems we received but more for how they made me feel. The little girl in the picture is not me although a lot of people thought it was. Someone had posted her on Facebook and I

was immediately drawn to her. She represents my innocent years long, long ago.

My childhood was by no means perfect but, in the end, it was good and after listening to the stories of so many of the other women I realized there was never a question that I was loved. The girl in the picture also represents the daughter I was never able to have. It's feasible that our child could have looked like her.

My Word(s)

We were asked to pick a word and after much thought I chose PEACE but that wasn't enough. This is the peace I feel because of God's Grace and Mercy; His unmerited Favor.

With all the things that have not gone my way, my life is pretty good. I could not have children but I do have a wonderful husband and family. My health is not perfect but I am so much better off than so many others. Diagnosed with lupus in 2003, I have been spared the harsher effects and it is under control with one medication. With that, I added a butterfly which symbolizes the butterfly rash some have.

I truly enjoyed this class and each week I looked forward to gathering with the other women at Tabitha's Table. Their stories were my stories and it helped me feel that it was alright to release and let go of some stuff.



Juanita Speaks

When recalling my childhood, one thing always stands out for me: I grew up without my father. He died when I was six years old and I really missed having him as part of my life. All of my friends had dads. They would talk about them, what they did or said or the places their fathers took them. I

could not say a word, but listened. My mother never married again.

Many years later at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church, we were on a retreat in the mountains. We were studying Psalms 139, "... You knew me before I was formed in the womb." This was a light bulb moment for me. God knew my father was going to die, but I have my heavenly Father who will always be with me. That was a healing moment for me. So for my childhood memory, I decided to remember my earthly father, who will always be with me in spirit.

Stephanie Speaks



The red in my quilt represents the despair I was in: I was not loving me for who God intended me to be, a mother, daughter, sister, friend, aunt and grandmother. The fading into the lighter hues represents God's grace and mercy. God shined His light on me and said, "Daughter I saw you broken, I saw you during your trials and

tribulations and yet you still stand. GOD will give you peace! God saw all of my struggles in my life and said, "You had to go through it so I could elevate you to be the woman that you are today." I am "Empowered." So now I know who I am, who God says I am and what I am to be: A child of God and like the phoenix, I rise!"
"The Lord is my strength and my defense he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise Him, my father's God, and I will exalt Him." (Exodus 15:2)



Priscilla Speaks

Most people look at a quilt and see the colors of the quilt and the design, but did you know most quilts tell a story? My first quilting try has both colors and design, but more importantly it tells a story. I used a Mandrake flower as the centerpiece of my quilt because the Mandrake can be found in

Genesis the first book of the Bible. I always loved trees with their different shades of

green, many blooms, and outstretched arms that always seem to be praising God. The star of my quilt, however, is the butterfly.

A butterfly starts its existence in a cocoon, protected from the outside world. My mother was my cocoon through birth and my teen to early adult years. Protecting me and guiding me, but somewhere in those years the cocoon opened and a caterpillar emerged. This is a strange stage of life for the caterpillar and me. I often frighten some people, who did not know what quite to make of me. I disappointed some people who may have thought I was one thing and I turned out to be something else. Some thought I was amusing in my wiggly, jiggly, gliding way of moving along. In the confusion of not knowing myself who I was, I went to the wrong places and sought love from the wrong people. Then one day on this journey, I stopped and listened to a man speak about the goodness and redemptive nature of God and thought I would give myself the opportunity to know God for myself.

I had to go through the stages of my life like the butterfly before I could be who I was truly meant to be. A fearful and wonderful woman of God. Just like the emergence from the cocoon to the journey of the caterpillar, I have been given new life like the butterfly-woman image sewn on my quilt. The pictures show me as a child and me as I am now, though I am still a work in progress for my story has not ended, yet.

Nancy Speaks



without it – and God.

I am a 57 year old Sapphire and still glowing and growing! Currently I am a D. staff developer with the Department of Social Services. I train the SNAP employees. I have two sons and I am in love with life. I did not always realize that I have strength but this journey at Tabitha's Table could not have been done

Eventually my pocket of truth will hold a picture of my granddaughter, Damayah Brie Miller. The image God sees me as is one of an inspirational speaker. My edges of my quilt are rough and not the same on all side, but that is just like me.

Linda Speaks



My name is Linda Silverberg. I came to NYC as a very sad, nine-year old girl! My parents had split up, and my mom who was devastated, insisted on fleeing to NYC to stay with her sister, Ethel. From a quiet city of seven hills, Lynchburg, Virginia, I was in shock when I landed on 42nd Street and 8th Avenue after debarking from a Trailways Bus.

Somehow I knew life as I knew it would never be the same. I grew up sewing doll clothes. My mom Ruby (who I would later learn was my adopted mother) sewed everything: my dresses, pants, and underwear! She made slipcovers and everything else under the sun.

I wanted to be like her. Somehow I always looked at doing things with my hands as being close to God. God made us as I had learned in church, so I associated making things with God.

I was very unhappy! I closed up! School made me even unhappier. It wasn't until one day in 5th grade, the art teacher I'll never forget, Mrs. Wengrow asked if I knew how to sew! From that day on, she always had other things for me to do in class: making potholders on a frame, to sewing felt squares together for the groups to do quilts. I think Mrs. Wengrow saved my life that year.

My Aunt Ethel crocheted and did needlepoint. I didn't like crocheting. Aunty would make me rip everything out if I missed a stitch. Yuck! But sewing and the love of it would be an everlasting friend. One of the few belongings my mother brought with us to NYC was her portable Singer. I remember it was in a brown wood container that had an arch on it. We would sew and for hours I'd listen to her telling me about her and her sisters sewing with their mom. Then Ruby got sick. Over the next few years I would be exposed to open sores and rotting flesh. I knew she stuck needles in her, but I didn't know why. Then she would leave and be gone for weeks, sometimes months to have two toes, half a foot, the rest of the foot to the ankle, then the leg up to the knee removed. This was one of the worst times for me. I was alone, and Aunty didn't know what to do with me except bring me material home from the garment center where she worked. I made things. When I wasn't crying, I was sewing. School didn't matter at that point. I consoled

myself with needle and thread. I well up when I thing about those times. But I felt at one with God, because we made things.

How did I come up with my quilt? At first I was troubled about portraying my image, what I saw of myself in a quilt. I never had a good image of myself. I never thought I was particularly smart, or pretty. I just existed. The only thing I did well was make things. The colors were easy, the pinks, the blues, portraying happiness and sadness. But my image? How did I want people to see me in the quilt? I wanted people to see a woman in prayer and in praise of an awesome God who protects, who remembers, who cares about her. A God that in all my shadows brought me comfort. I was thinking about how I always wanted to be: graceful, beautiful, loving, kind and likeable.

I was thinking about the way I want God to see me! But God already knows I'm graceful, beautiful, loving, kind and likeable. I was made that way. Now how I turned out or behaved was of my own doing! But God made a perfect creature to commune with in praise and thanksgiving! I have been granted the gift of two sons that I love, and I hope will live a purposeful life to the Glory of God. I give God all the praise for everything that my life has been, is now, and whatever will be!

Irene Speaks



I created this quilt during “Conversations at Tabitha’s Table,” coordinated by Minister Pamela Jones. In this class we were instructed to develop the quilt that told our own stories. I named this quilt “Love,” as my life has been centered on love. As a child, I grew

up in a loving household where my parents always provided love and nurturing, and gave me a sense of security. I was always told by my immediate family as well as my extended family that I was beautiful and intelligent, and always gave me encouragement and support.

This quilt reflects the lightness of my spirit and personality. Growing up and at each phase of my life, when various learning opportunities presented themselves I tried to engage as much as possible. I learned a lot from reading books, attending seminars, workshops, and attending seminars as well as engaging in conversation whenever possible. Coming to St Paul Community Baptist Church where many opportunities were presented. I am extremely grateful.

I used many colors in my quilt. Gold represents wealth, royalty, deep spirituality and elegance. Purple was used for the background; this color has been worn by women throughout the ages. Red represents sacrifice and struggle, which was experienced while trying to balance being a black woman, attain an education, having a husband and family. A little blue and green when put together represents peacefulness, abundant

health, prosperity and good fortune. Whereas I am not rich with money and material things, but God has placed many positive and wonderful people in my life. I've added a little silver and yellow which together represents abundant health and royalty.

The biblical flowers remind us of God's beautiful creations. Family is very important. My mother and my two aunts were a great source of strength and my strong role models, and the love of my husband for the last fifty five years has made me know just how blessed I am. Together we have a loving family, which are the photographs I put on my quilt. My favorite Scripture is Psalms 34:1 "I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually Be in my mouth."



women that participated with Tabitha Table shared their experiences, some of them were painful, but that made the group stronger.

My quilt represents some of my struggles and joys in life. The background of my quilt is mainly green with blue intertwined which represents past relationships with men and how I viewed or how little I thought of myself. I have been in relationships giving men all of me and losing myself in the process, not demanding anything of them afraid

Alice Speaks

It has been a joy and honor to work on this project. I have attempted quilting twice before but this is my first finished quilt. I believe the reason that I finish[ed] this quilt was because each piece segment of the quilt was presented with scripture and conversation. The

that they will leave, which eventually happen anyway. So whatever pain I had left over, I left it on my quilt. I am valuable, I have worth, and I need to keep me for myself instead of letting someone walk away with me in their back pocket.

Praises to God Almighty, I am a cancer survivor. Therefore, I definitely wanted to incorporate that in my quilt. The picture that I place on the quilt was found while searching for my baby picture at my Mother's house; this was the first time that I had seen this picture of me and my son. It was taken at my niece's 8th grade graduation. I remember the day very well; I was still going through chemotherapy and radiation at the time. I didn't realize I look so thin and gaunt, after discovering the picture; it had to be on my quilt, and the word I associated with this struggle was courageous, you have to be strong, have a strong belief in GOD, have loving, supportive and most importantly praying family and friends.

My quilt represents my joy, God has brought me through some rough patches but the majority of the time he has given me joy. I was asked how God sees me. I want God to see me dancing and praising his name. He has given me a second chance at life, and it is, oh, so sweet. He is my healer, my friend, my savior; through him I have everlasting life. God has kept me here to be of service to his people. I serve in many capacities at church, I am a NYS Licensed Massage Therapist, and I want to make a difference in people lives especially our seniors. My favorite scriptures are Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ Jesus who has strength me" and Psalms 19:14 "Let the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer."

Thank you again Minister Jones for giving me the opportunity of discovering the lost art of Women getting together, connecting, talking out their problems or concerns. Tabitha Table gave me that platform, to relax, to relate and to know, my sister on a more intimate level.

China Speaks



Whenever I feel stressed out I love going to a peaceful space with colors of blue and orange. It cheers me up. These colors remind me of the sunset on the ocean. The image that God sees me as free flowing as the water of the ocean and as illuminating as the sun – that is why my dress flows out into the quilt. My fondest childhood

memory was when I was eight years old and went away to camp. I had so much fun. It was great to get away from life in the city.

The word for my statement of truth is “Trust.” I need to trust people more. I have a very hard time trusting people because of the wrong things done to me in the past.

However, the more I learn to place my trust in God, the more I know God is covering and protecting me from harm, and that helps.

The hands on my image are raised, giving praise and thanks to God for all of the things God brought me through.

Carla Speaks



I love color – especially bright colors. The royalty of purple, the sunniness and happiness of yellow, and the greenness of life. That is why I have so many splashes of color, because it makes me feel alive. Whenever I am feeling sad, I surround myself with bright colors, I dress in bright colors.

The image of myself as God sees me

is naked because God knows everything about me. I ended up putting a skirt on her because as a child I clung to my grandmothers skirt tail. My childhood pictures are hidden under the skirt. This is because in order to really get to know me and learn about my childhood you have to get really close to me. I put a flower above her head to represent happy thoughts.

The Spirit of God represented by the flower we pieced together is made up from fabric taken from each of the Sistahs at Tabitha's Table. Instead of a pocket of truth, I have a medicine bag which contains oil for anointing, a mirror for self-reflection, a feather to remind me to keep my heart as light as a feather, and incense because it God loves the sweetness of its smell.

One of the memories from my childhood was how my mother would beat me. They were very harsh. I lived with my grandmother in Trinidad until high school. My mother would come from New York just to beat me. I did not understand why she did that until I understood that she beat me because I reminded her of herself. She did not want me to

turn out like her, so she beat me because she did not know the words to say to me. She did not want me to make the same mistakes that she made in life. I understand that today.

I really felt joy working at Tabitha's Table. The fellowship, the stories and lessons I learned will be remembered every time I look at my quilt. It will be a constant reminder to relax and let go and let God.

Rita Speaks



Tabitha's Table experience allowed me the opportunity to express my feelings of hope through my journey of healing as a breast cancer survivor. The devastation of breast cancer has a major impact on my body image and self-esteem. In spite of the body image alteration and hair loss, there is still hope for survival.

During chemotherapy, I lost my hair and was bald for eight months. After treatment, my hair grew back and I made a promise that I would donate my braid once it grew at least fourteen inches. The quilt represents the picture taken of me before I cut my hair and donated it to Lots of Love. It was my way of giving a child hope during their journey with cancer.

Denise Speaks



When I first sat down at Tabitha's Table, I had no idea what this workshop was going to be about, other than I was going to make a quilt. I remained silent for the first three sessions, just listening to the other Sistahs talk.

I was more focused on trying to get my quilt to look pretty like everyone else's. Then one day after I was working on my quilt and reflecting on the quilting circle on childhood memories and truth telling, I realized, my quilt was about my family and the love I feel for them. Then I looked at the quilt and said to myself, "Now I can do this."

I grew up in a really close knit family. That is why I have pictures of my brothers and sisters on the quilt. I was very close to my mother, who is a breast cancer survivor. That is why I put the breast cancer ribbon on the quilt. We prayed for her healing, and God answered our prayer. My image shows me learning to be more prayerful. I want to increase my prayer life and I know God loves us to pray because it is the way we speak to God – and God will speak back to us.

Willetta Speaks



would be in the hospital for two weeks. The doctors were amazed at my progress, and I went home in one week. That was the healing power of God. Satan and the world could not beat me down.

Today, I am doing very well. The Scriptures tell us that if you have the faith of a mustard seed God will show up and move mountains. God has certainly moved some mountains in my life and I don't look like what I have been through. The image of myself is crooked. That is because life is not a straight path. Your path will twist and turn until you get to that place of peace and understanding in your life. That is why my word of truth is "Peace." I have found peace in my life, and at Tabitha's Table there is nothing but peace and love in Jesus Christ. All you have to do is come to the table.

I have had many struggles in life, but God has seen me through it all. I had serious health issues, but God spoke to me and said, "I've got you!" I required surgery that required my esophagus to be removed. They needed to attach my throat directly to my stomach. It was expected that I

Gwendolyn Speaks



My father kicked me out of my home when I was seventeen, after coming after my curfew from a party. I have lived on my own ever since. It was very heartbreak and difficult for me going from the security of a loving home to the harsh streets. But I knew that my heavenly Father would not leave me nor forsake me. I managed to finish high school,

but my father did not come to my graduation. It was not until the birth of my first child that my father opened up to me again and we began the long process of healing our relationship. My father has since gone on to be with the Lord, but we were able to reconcile our relationship. And that gives me great joy.

The colors blue, red, yellow and purple were mixed together to show a lump of sadness comes through showing hope sparkling wildly, sprinkle in a glitter of happiness and joy. The Prodigal Daughter Quilt is a quilt of anger turned to forgiveness, trust, and unconditional love. I once was lost and now I am found by my earthy father and my Heavenly Father. I also use the colors red, orange, blue and yellow to show God's presence, Holiness and purity. The colors are God's energies. The Lotus flower represent how I developed out of the muddy waters and rough conditions of life like that of a lotus flower [that] grows into a beautiful, clean white or colorful flower. Despite the conditions, the lotus maintain strength and push[es] aside each of the dirty obstacles and make[s] its way to clearer surface freeing itself from the harsh conditions below.

Therefore, in the face of all my difficulties and obstacles, I learned to push through and do my best to cope with the situations that life brought my way, learn[ed] to hold it all together and keep going and moving forward to heal and become whole. I am moving from the pain of the past to the promise of the future while living in the moment which is the now, the present. This is my year of awakening, open and free.

The deep pain I have experienced in my life sometimes seem like it won't go away. It is anchored in the strains of the past that sometimes resurfaced every now and then. However, the past is never dead. I will now embrace my past with joy, because it is well and deep into my soul. It is a part of me and I must embrace and celebrate it. Therefore, the lotus represents power, purity, faithfulness, divine birth and vitality.

Vitality is the ability to live, grow and develop to endure and survive. Like the lotus plant, I, you, we have the opportunity to grow in vitality, persistent, endurance and growth in extreme adversity. And I remain faithful in God in spite of all my hardships. Like the beautiful lotus plant. I, you, we have the opportunity to grow and become the person God intended for me to be – WHOLE. We all encounter tough times. Do we grow in vitality in the face of adversity or do we collapse under the weight of circumstances and turn from God?

The Prodigal Daughter restored her relationship with her father after a series of changes in life and the birth of my daughter. I believed my father in his own way had tried to restore and reconciled our relationship on many, many occasions. The love was always there, but the relationship broken, lost or taken because of a dispute - has now been found, restored and reconciled. Sometimes you have to get lost to get found and disappointments can be a blessing. I am not waiting for the storms to pass, but learning

to dance in the rain. Behind ever cloud, there's a silver lining. Look behind the clouds, the sun is still there shining.

God sees me as a faithful child of the King. He has always been my answer and my hope in everything even when I left Him. He never left me. I have had some wonderful moments in my journey of survival when I had felt His spirit and His presence surround[ed] me. And, sometimes I could not understand it or believe what I was seeing. God sees me transforming and awakening to all that life has to offer like the beautiful lotus which is a symbol of rebirth, reconciliation and regeneration. I am always ready to take on the world with God as my anchor from the muddy waters of adversities of life while maintaining a relationship with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as my teacher and my advocate. I overcame and [have] overcome my struggles by truly believing in Jesus and keeping the faith in spite of all difficulties, temptations and trials in spite of all opposition.

I have taken the shreds of my past and my spiritual fabric and hand sewn them back together one stitch at a time. The pain of the past, the suffering, the difficulties, the obstacles and trials that sums up to unconditional love and memories are created into a beautiful and unique quilt. The picture of my father on the quilt is a symbol of his physical presence and a reminder of unforgettable moments. It was created with love and tears. The Prodigal Daughter's Quilt is in memory of my father, David Bethea.

Seleah Speaks



When I came to Tabitha's Table I thought my life was perfect. It really was, yet there was something that was weighing heavily on me. I had a beautiful childhood. I was married to a wonderful man, had three lovely children and a great job. My issue was that I was facing "the empty nest

syndrome." My sons were two well-raised young men and now starting their lives on their own. My youngest daughter, whom everyone calls "Mini-me" is now almost finished with high school and is looking forward to going away to college. Whereas she used to spend most of her time with me, she now wants to be out and about with her friends. Soon, she will be gone. My husband and I now find ourselves alone with each other and we feel like this is a new phase in our life – a new beginning.

I know God has blessed my family, but now what lies ahead for me? My quilt is covered with flowers which represent my family. They are the gift that God gave to me. The image God sees me as is a woman about to embark on a new phase in her life. If it is anything like the past, I know I will be blessed, as I am in the present and in the future. All I have to do is keep on thanking and praising God.

Sharon Speaks



filled with many days and nights of fun and games.

My story begins with my first memories of myself as a young girl, probably about four. I was happy, somewhat shy and eager to please. The middle child of two sisters...one six years older and the other about 1 ½ years younger. We were each happy in our own circles. My childhood was

At one point, I went to sleep away camp. It was a wonderful time. When it was time to return, my summer mom dressed me in a beautiful red dress with colorful bows on my pony tails. I was so happy and excited to see my mother at the bus station. I felt beautiful. My mom, when she saw me, did not share that feeling. The colors were probably very bright and highlighted my complexion. Oh, did I forget to mention that my complexion is very dark, like my father. My mother and my sisters have a medium brown complexion. I feel like that was the last day in my childhood that I felt beautiful and special. I continued to have fun and friends and learn and grow, but I did not feel carefree as a child should be.

I have always been fiercely devoted to my family. My love and dedication to my family has always been a driving force in my life. I also have the added bonus of having a wonderful son who is growing into a fantastic young man.

Fast forward to me today. When I think about the person I am and how God sees me I feel my past my present and my future. I still remember the person I was...smart,

shy, friendly, hardworking, yet, always holding something back. Conversations at Tabitha's Table have helped me to release the tension and let go through fellowship with my Sistahs and quilting. Today, I feel strengthened by God's love, how he has directed me and my confidence in his plan for my life. As God looks down on me, I believe he sees the woman I have become as I do my best to fulfill his mission for my life.

I gain strength by reciting one of my favorite scriptures, Psalm 23, that begins, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." My quilt reflects the woman I have become; the peace I have in God's love and my commitment to love my family and bring the light of life and God's love where ever I go.

Barbara Speaks



I never thought I could accomplish something so beautiful. The skill that it took to take pieces of fabric, like the chaos in my life and turning it into something so stunning. I started with the color blue, which represented my sadness that I was feeling and used the green to represent the joy I wished to accomplish. I see myself blossoming in joy in

the midst of my turmoil. For in the midst of that chaos, I feel the presence of God, and with Him all things are possible. I have found my moment of sustaining peace with God's grace, and I find it is sufficient for me.

These are the Sistahs who sat at Tabitha's Table. There were two other Sistahs who attended every session but did not make a quilt. They said they were there just for support, conversation, and fellowship. About four other women came and sat in from time to time just for the conversation. When other women in the congregation heard about the experiences of the women who participated at the table, they asked if I could do it again. Also, as our circle came to a close, the Quilting Circle VII was used for finishing work that needed to be done.

They presented our quilts to the women of the congregation on October 3, 2015 at the Jewel Summit. Because of the positive responses from the Sistahs and request from other women, Conversations at Tabitha's Table will continue starting January 30, 2016. This time we will be focusing on relationships. The Sistahs who sat at the table first have become the New Tabitha's for the future sessions. But this is what it was all about: Resurrecting the Creative Spirit of Tabitha within each woman to bring about healing and restoration of and changing our thoughts and world through the art of interpretive quilting.

CHAPTER 7

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS TO THE PROJECT

This demonstration project addresses three questions: A psychosocial issue, a historical question, and Biblical/theological engagement.

Psychosocial Issue

The first question addressed, the psychosocial issue is: What is Cumulative lifetime Stress and its impact among African-American women in urban settings?

The prevalence of this disorder is proportionately high within urban communities. In some way the triple jeopardy of racism, classism and sexism play strongly in the etiology of this disorder. It can also be due to the stressors that come with the relationships we engage in or disengage from. Certain diseases can be reduced among African-American women by decreasing the dis-ease of our lives. The prevalence of stress is so profound that it has become a way of life in the urban community.

Often times, as Black women we are confronted with stressors on multiple levels. From living in our communities which often lack appropriate services such as housing, ease of access to health care and nutritious foods, as well as living in environments that are not conducive for guaranteeing our children's safety, let alone our own, we either feel like the victim or the savior of our situation. In addition, in the workplace, because we need our jobs we tend to acquiesce to unsurmountable pressures from our places of employment. In our home, many of us are the single head of household, primary bread winner, sometimes raising not only our own children, but grandchildren as well. Under

the pressures to keep everything going, we push ourselves beyond the extreme, to the point we forget to breathe naturally and relax. This allows tension and frustration to build up within our bodies sending us into a constant state of fight or flight.

In her dissertation, Melissa B. Littlefield which examined stress and African American women from a Womanist perspective revealed,

Due to historic racism and sexism, African American women occupy a vulnerable status in the United States which places them at risk for stress. In response to their oppression, they have developed a culture of resistance.⁹²

Factors such as social support, role identity and religiosity have been shown to be protective factors against stress in African American women. However they can also be factors that increase stress as well, especially in divorced women. Often what occurs is a wall of resistance is built that prevents utilization of tools that are meant to save or at least lighten our stress loads. Instead of support from family, friends and community, (as well as identifying with our role as nurturers of the family and our faith acting as a catalyst to propel us forward and keep us going during hard times), we resist them and block them from working to reduce stress.

By alerting the women to the fact that Cumulative Lifetime Stress is real within the community and finding outlets to reduce stress, women can start focusing on creative solutions to their problems. Through the process of the gathering, the women were able to discover a new outlet for relieving stress. Through education, they were awakened to this disorder and given ways in which to decrease the probability of contracting serious disease in life. Their spiritual foundation is key in how they viewed life's challenges and

⁹² Melissa B. Littlefield, "Stress and African American Women: An Examination of Selected Protective Factors from a Womanist Perspective" (PhD diss., Howard University, 1998), <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/304436428?accountid=10226> (accessed December 8, 2014).

how they overcame many of the obstacles. However, what this project has demonstrated most is that sitting in relationship with other women and then sitting in solitude with oneself, focusing on something that is creative gives you the opportunity to just let go and let the Spirit of God's creativity in you take control.

Historical Background

The second question addressed by this project is: How has quilting among African American women been used as a creative outlet to benefit the individual quilter and the community?

Many would ask, why did you choose quilting as the artistic medium for this project? The answer is simple. Quilting saved my life! I am a single African American mother trying to survive in the urban area of East Brooklyn New York. As a resident of this community, I was not immune to the effects of the stresses of life. I was a survivor of domestic and intimate partner violence, overworked, underemployed, unemployed, living between a weed spot and a crack house, raising two children, and emotionally traumatized. It was no wonder I was diagnosed with Hypertension at age 35 and told I was looking at a heart attack by the time I was 40 if I did not make a conscious effort to de-stress myself and change my lifestyle. That is when I decided to slow down, eat a balanced diet, lay off the Pepsi, cigarettes and whatever other substances consumed to placate or suppress my stress and started quilting.

The following year I returned to the doctor, my blood pressure was normal and my disposition was less tensed. I found quilting to be very relaxing. I could sit for hours and work on a quilt and let my mind soar away from my problems and worries. I also began an exercise program and eliminated all drinks containing caffeine and began to drink only water. Quilting time was meditation time. I would not allow any distractions. I

wanted to share this gift with other women, which is why it became the focus of this project.

However there is more to quilting then just my story. It is the story many African American women and of our ancestors who came here to America whether by force or voluntarily.

The movement of people from West and Central Africa to the Caribbean and to the port cities of North America - Charleston, Savannah, New Orleans, and Jamestown – begins the creation of a pan-African cultural heritage -shaped by chattel slavery and the struggle for freedom.⁹³

Enslaved Africans may have been viewed by ignorant white Europeans as savage, uneducated beast of burden and tried never to let us connect with our past history; however, it is through the memory of our past that our ancestors were able to take the materials available to them and begin to reconstruct themselves in this new and strange land.⁹⁴

Stories could be told, images from the past could be recreated, and put to practical use through the warmth that was provided by a quilt. Something of beauty could be created by the tattered scraps provided by their enslavers.

Secret messages were soon developed, as if the hands of the quilter were playing the drum that sent messages of escape, freedom and liberation. Through the quilt, encoded symbols and secretive knowledge could be passed along under the watchful eye of the enslaver.⁹⁵ “Communicating secrets using ordinary objects is very much a part of African culture, in which familiarity provides the perfect cover. Messages could be

⁹³ Jacqueline Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View: The Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 5.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 9.

skillfully passed on through objects that are seen so often they become invisible. These objects were creative expressions of African artisanship and give tangible form to the cultural and religious ideas of their kingdom.”⁹⁶ Within each enslaved African was the ability to recall the tales of the Griot, the symbols and signs of the African secret societies. The quilts were used to replace the symbols through the use of designs and block patterns and the stitching replaced the message board of the Griot. The quilt layers bound together by threads, whether intricacy hand sewn or tied and knotted became a message board; a specially designed mnemonic device chronicling the history our people.⁹⁷ Whether references to the Fon symbols from the Republic of Bienne in West Africa, Congo symbols from Central Africa, Christian symbols, and Masonic sign, every quilt tells a story.

Although their lives were faced with many atrocities and hardships, enslaved African women were still able to find and reconstruct the beauty that lay within their souls. They were able to provide warmth and comfort to their families through a quilt.

In times of separation from their Motherland of Africa, lonely, frightened and exhausted, memories of the shapes, deities, the colors, figures, people and animals still remained etched in their DNA. And with those torn ragged pieces of fabric that were handed to them to make do with, they crafted masterpieces.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 37.

“What’s in a Quilt?

You look at my quilt with a quizzical eye,
Remark on its beauty and ask
If it’s worth all the time and work that it took
To complete such a painstaking task.
“T’was a labor of love, “I try to explain
A means to express what I feel
And preserve for the future some small part of me
That everyday life may conceal.
Into its patches I’ve stitched all the thoughts,
The dreams, the struggles, the fights,
The gladness, the sadness, the joy and the pain,
And the search for beauty and rights.
It’s a simple quilt, really, just pieced out of scraps
In a pattern I worked out one day.
I sorted and pondered before I began,
And finally arranged it this way...”⁹⁸

Remember the love you had for grandma’s soft green dress? It is now a patchwork of designs worked throughout the quilt you wrap up in on a cool summer’s evening, reminding your senses as she would snuggle you up in her pillow-like arms, smelling of lavender and spice. She would sing you a lullaby or just sweet talk you to sleep. If you were lucky, she would tell you of the past; of a time when things were different, yet in some ways the same. Sewn ever so neatly beside the white cotton seersucker cloth your christening gown she made for you reminding you that you are a child of the One Most High. And though Grandmother may be gone, the memory of her will live on every time to touch that quilt.

My mother, Betty Jean Jones is a quilter, as was her mother, Eddie Mae Watkins-Lewis. I never asked my mother how she felt about quilting. But Mom loved doing traditional quilt block and queen sized bed quilts. She loved cutting out all of those pieces

⁹⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Empowering Memory and Movement: Thinking and Working Across Borders* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 1.

and arranging them in the precise pattern and stitching them all together. She has made quilts for each of her children and working on quilts for her three grandchildren and three great grandchildren. She is pictured here with a patch work quilt she made for my nephew, Harry Allan Jones.



She did tell me one day that she was glad she had started quilting again because it is what gave her peace after the sudden death of my father and the long suffering death of my brother, Kenneth. “It takes my mind off my worries . . . lets me rethink things.”

Quilting does force one to sit quietly at times, only with her/himself and God, and think, yielding to a still small voice that guides your thoughts as well as your stitches. Sometimes you can stitch out a solution, other times just a peace of mind, but out of whatever you do, a new day to continue to work on your quilt and sit in the silence as the pieces of the cloth are sewn together to become a new creation, so can we equate this quiet time with the Spirit of our Creator can utilize to create a new being, a new reality, or outlook on life for us.

Quilting is also a way to bring family and community together. “Quilting is intergenerational,” states Julie Rambo of the We Sew Love Quilters of the New Prospect Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan. “In the south, everyone made quilts, but today so many young girls never learn because we did not need to teach them once we could go to the store to buy them. But once you show them, they get excited and take off.”⁹⁹

Harriet Tubman, the abolitionist and leader of the Underground Railroad, would sit quietly hiding in the woods waiting for nightfall to continue on her mission. While she patiently waited, she would sew together small pieces of fabric to make quilts (she called comforters) for the fugitives in Canada.¹⁰⁰ I wonder what worries she may have been releasing while she stitched. Possibly, could she have been thinking out different routes to take or about family and friends she had to leave behind? Or could she be thinking to herself,

I had reasoned dis out in my mind; dere was one of two things I had a right to, liberty, or death; if I could not have one, I would have de oder; for no man should take me alive; I should fight for my liberty as long as my strength lasted, and when de time came for me to go, the Lord would let them take me.¹⁰¹

A quilt is a covering made from three layers: The top, the outer beauty, the new creation from scraps of fabric cut and sewn into a pattern; The middle layer the filler or the batting that gives us warmth, sometimes containing medicinal herbs of healing or those prickly old cotton seeds that were not removed the cotton gin made the process to remove them easier somehow were always the warmest and used when you had a bad

⁹⁹ Julie Rambo, interview by author, Detroit, Michigan, December 26, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Tobin, 63-64.

¹⁰¹ Sarah H. Bradford, *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 17.

cold. Somehow you knew there must be some magical power that heals within this layer, not realizing that the key ingredient was really the love. Then the final layer, or the backing onto which the top and middle layers are sewn. It is the underpinning upon which all else will rest. It is the layer closest to the skin under which one can rest from problems, sorrow, worries, illness and pain.

Quilts in African American Literature

In African American literature a quilt can often be symbolically placed within a story. The quilts that were used to collect, honor, and comfort the “bones of dose dat come afore we!”¹⁰² In Julie Dash’s, *Daughters of the Dust*, the bones that were discovered by Lucy as she worked the field for planting only to unearth the demise of the ancestors who had come before them. Their bones were laid upon the quilts so all “can see de old ones.”¹⁰³ Dash was in essence honoring the ancestors, by lovingly placing them upon the quilts that had been passed from one generation to the next. Symbolically, it represented the pact between the living and the dead to remember and honor the ancestors.

Quilts also represent the metaphorical rebirth and bonding. For example, in *The Color Purple*, Sophia and Celie piece together a quilt using the old curtains that were destroyed in a fight between Sophia and her husband Harpo and a yellow dress that Shug Avery donated to the cause.¹⁰⁴ Alice Walker shows that connections are made among women who quilt. After Sofia confronts Celie for telling her step son Harpo to beat Sophia for not “Minding,” Sophia throws the curtains that Celie has made back at her in a

¹⁰² Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 240.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 241.

¹⁰⁴ Walker, *The Color Purple*, 39, 58.

rage. “After talking through the ways that each woman deals with the suffering implicit to her cultural position, the two reconcile by ‘Making quilt pieces out of the messed up curtain.’”¹⁰⁵ “Their rage submits to the homing/power of the cloth, two equal/two pieces of cloth rock each one/of us back into consciousness, to self-recognition and rest.”¹⁰⁶ Celie considers giving it to Shug if it’s perfect or keeping it for herself. However, when Sophia decides to leave Harpo, Celie decides to give the quilt to her out of love and concern, not knowing “what her sister place be like,” concerned about the cold winter that may be coming, and whether or not Sophia and her children will have to sleep on the floor.¹⁰⁷ Necessity and the meeting of a loved one’s needs for comfort during difficult times, trying Celie’s concern and care for Sophia brings the bond between them full circle.

In Gloria Naylor’s “Mama Day,” the characters Miranda and her sister Abigail create a double wedding ring quilt for Abigail’s granddaughter Cocoa, as a wedding gift. Though Cocoa had decided on a simpler design, Mama Day insists on making the painstakingly difficult pattern, reminding Abigail, “This quilt will be passed on to my great-grand nieces and nephews when it’s time for them to marry. And since I won’t be around to defend myself, I don’t want them thinking I was a lazy old somebody who couldn’t make a decent double-ring quilt.”¹⁰⁸ Mama Day is actually a part to this quilt; a piece of herself will forever be preserved in the patches and stitches. There is an

¹⁰⁵ Alice Walker, *Everyday Use*, ed. Barbara Christian (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 179.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰⁷ Walker, *The Color Purple*, 67.

¹⁰⁸ Naylor, *Mama Day*, 136.

interconnectedness between the family that comes, “as she uses: a bit of her daddy’s Sunday shirt is matched with Abigail’s lace slip, the collar from Hope’s graduation dress, the palm of Grace’s baptismal gloves . . . Her needle fastens the satin trim of Peace’s receiving blanket to Cocoa’s baby jumper to a pocket of her own gardening apron.”¹⁰⁹ Naylor uses the quilt to reinforce the reader’s “awareness of the mystery, the complicity, the inter-relation of women’s lives and friendships are imagined in the quilt . . . reminding readers that women’s lives, and their patterns of experience, are the focus of Mama Day.”¹¹⁰

The Quilt as a Metaphor

Quilting has been used metaphorically not only to describe relationships among women in African American women’s literature but also in the understanding of biblical history and literature. History as told throughout the Bible has been redacted so many times over the centuries. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza states, “My favorite metaphor for history writing that understands historiography as history making, as integrating the surviving scraps of source information like pieces of cloth into a new and different design.”¹¹¹ If organized religion begins to look at the biblical text as a collection of pieces stitched together to make a quilt, they will understand that the stories of the Bible are many stories on top or next to many stories, specifically placed in a certain way for a certain design. When looking the text in overview at a distance we may view biblical history from a patriarchal standpoint only. However, when you get up close and really examine the text, you see the individual patches sewn together in a specific pattern, with

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 137

¹¹⁰ Walker, *Everyday Use*, 177.

¹¹¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, 293.

each patch telling a different story. When you look at it from different angles, you will see different stories. I would surmise that it is looking at the text with different hermeneutical lenses, each time seeing something new and different.

“Metaphors do not merely name things which already exist. They have the affective power to transform our consciousness and to evoke new visions which lead to new actions.”¹¹² What better way to describe the piecing of a quilt. It is not about taking the scraps of fabrics and making something familiar; it takes what is familiar and moves your thoughts to create something else. For example, our congregations can be viewed using the metaphor of the quilt. Each person represents a different fabric to be included in the body of the quilt, just as they are a different part of the Body of Christ. Each one has a purpose and a place. We must celebrate the diversity, the gender differences, multiply, equality, justice and well-being for all in the piecing together of this quilted congregation. “Failure to do so will,” according to Schüssler Fiorenza, “foster fundamentalism, exclusivism and furthering of a totalitarian global monoculture.” The more diverse our congregations are the more beautiful they become.

Yes, the women would gather, many hands working in unison to create one quilt. But in their coming together to stitch out of necessity they were letting the Spirit within them free. Free to create something new out of the ripped and torn fabrics, they were imagining within their spirits carefully reconnecting the fibers of their own lives.

So we are on a journey back in time, although we are also present here in our time, coming together in the fellowship of Sistah-hood. As we sit and stitch together at Tabitha’s Table, we are sharing and caring for one another, learning about our legacy as

¹¹² Shannon Schrein, *Quilting and Braiding: The Feminist Christologies of Sallie McFague and Elizabeth A. Johnson in Conversation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 41.

Black women and envisioning a new world for our families through the Spirit of creativity as we reconnect the fibers of our lives.

Biblical/Theological Engagement

The final research question deals with how to engage the psychosocial issue of Cumulative Lifetime Stress and the history of African American women quilting with biblical and theological study. Specifically, how can the story of Tabitha in Acts 9:36-43 inspire and resurrect women going through stressful issues within their own lives? How does her story empower, resurrect, and breathe new life in women who are facing the challenges of urban life in America?

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.

But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her; they laid her in an upper room.

And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them

Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.

But Peter put them all out, knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.

Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner (Acts 9:36-43, NKJV).

Ever wonder what life must have been like during the days of the early church? The Bible tells us detailed stories about the early church fathers. However, what must it have been like for the women? Acts 9:36-43 gives us just a snippet of the life of one woman, Tabitha. It does not tell us much other than she was known for doing good works and charitable deeds. We know she must have been one heck of a fashion designer and seamstress because the widows were showing Peter the tunics, the simple undergarment that was worn closest to the body underneath a cloak of fabric that was hand woven and stitched and other garments, which were probably more fashionable. However, there is so much in the text that needs to be examined.

The reason for choosing this text as the focus of this project is first and foremost it is coming from the Word of God. Her story must carry great significance if it is included in the Bible. Secondly, her story was selected because she is a woman who sewed. If you have ever sat in the home of a seamstress, it is always busy . . . people are always coming and going, some even sit for a while and wait for their garment to be altered or completed. Tabitha, being a disciple of the faith would possibly use this time to bring the Good News of the Gospel to all who crossed her threshold. The third and most profound reason for selecting this text was that Tabitha died an unexplained death.

The Scriptures tell us she became sick and died. How did this happen? How could God allow this Spirit-filled woman to become sick and die? The narrative does not say. However, the author of the text is speaking as a historian or objective reporter of the early church.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza contends that

The image of the historian as objective reporter needs to be replaced with that of the historian as a quilt maker fitting together the surviving scraps of

historical information into an overall design that gives meaning to the individual pieces.”¹¹³

Often, when reading this text, I have found that there is much that is not mentioned literally, but an understanding of what was going on in the lives of people during this particular event can be pieced together by a conscious reader.

Just as a quilt brings together patchwork pieces into an artistic overall design, so also the writing of history does not provide a ready-made mirror of past events but a stitching together of historical information into a coherent overall design or interpretative model. In order to write a historical account, scholars have to make inferences based in part on their sources and in part on their general understanding of human behavior and society.¹¹⁴

Every text is created within some context. Three developmental stages of a text must be considered in the interpretive process. First is the event, second the recording of the event in the text, and third the reading of the text.¹¹⁵ The time period between each of these events could be centuries.

When looking at the event, the focus is on exactly what was happening in the narrative. The disciple, Tabitha, was always doing good deeds and helping the poor. This means she had made an impact within her community. Her home could have possibly been used as a meeting place for believers, since the early churches were in homes. Acts 2:42-46 NIV states, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer . . . They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”

¹¹³ Schüssler Fiorenza, 339-40.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 340.

¹¹⁵ W Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 38.

Knowing from Acts 4-7 that the community of Christ was under great persecution by the Jewish leadership and under oppression by the Roman Empire, poor Tabitha, or Dorcas in the Greek, met her fate possibly because she was overwhelmed by what was taking place in the world around her.¹¹⁶ However, Act 9 opens with the conversion of Saul, who was among the Jewish persecutors of the followers of the Way. After his conversion, he angered Grecian Jews with his teachings in the streets and synagogues of Jerusalem, plotted to kill him, then he was sent to Tarsus. Verse 31 states, “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31 NIV). So maybe it was not the fear of persecution after the conversion of Saul, but there was before. Yet still there was work to be done to care for the widows and the poor. And with the growing numbers of followers, there would also be an increase of those who came to the church for assistance.

The task of caring for all of those in need of charity must have been monumental. It is quite likely Tabitha may have been suffering from what is today known as Cumulative Life-time Stress Disorder, psychosomatic disorder caused by living and experiencing stressful situations or living conditions over a prolonged period of time that eventually manifest as actual physical disease if the stressors and distress in to the mind are not alleviated.

¹¹⁶ In Acts 4:1-4, Peter and John were arrested for teaching in the temple of Jesus and the resurrection. In Acts 5:17, the Sadducees and high priest had the Apostles arrested for preaching at the temple. They were freed that night by angel of the Lord, and instructed to returned to the temple and continued preaching .In Acts 7:54-60, Stephen, one of the seven men chosen by the Apostles charged with the daily distribution of food to the growing number of disciples in Acts 6:1-7. After a dispute in the Synagogue, some Jews accused him of blasphemy against Moses and God and he was seized and brought before the council, gave his testimony of faith, and was stoned to death.

Next the recording of the event in the text was examined. It is believed that the Book of Acts was written around 63-70 A.D., a period of Christian persecution by Rome. Many of the illnesses in the New Testament could have been a result of this disorder given that the people of that time were under constant threats and oppression by the Roman government. Poverty was the norm during that time. There was the constant threat of violence at the hands of the Roman Legion, used to keep the peace within the Empire. Urban centers were often overpopulated and the people underserved by the government. The ruling classes held more than their share of the wealth and the Jewish aristocracies maintained their own self-interest. And of course taxes on the people were higher than they oftentimes could afford to pay to the Empire. If one could not afford to pay, they could lose their land, be imprisoned or sold into slavery.

Women had it hard in those times. If you did not have the benefit of a father, husband, brother or son to care for you, you lived in a state of perpetual poverty. Though she was not given a title other than disciple, nor is she introduced in the pericope as a wife of, daughter of, or mother of, she apparently has never been married, parents are no longer living and she has no children.

During the life of Jesus, He instructed followers to treat all as equals. Regarding women as equals was rather radical for his time in Judaism and history. This new way of behavior was taught to his disciples in regards to women and He expected them to exhibit a regard for women as he himself modelled. According to theologian, Monsignor John W. Sweeny,

This was also quite a step of departure for many people in those days that thought of women disciples only as servants, not as equals . . . His teachings required the treatment of women and widows be done with

respect as well as holding men to a higher standard of sexual behavior than often expected at that time in history.¹¹⁷

Women in the early church maintained their status of leadership in the Christian community and as heads of house churches. Sweeny contends that the role and status of women in leadership in the early church changed with the writings of Augustine that demonized women as being responsible for Original Sin through Eve. Through the sexual act for procreation, that evil is transmitted to the next generation. His theological speculations as well as other speculations for Tertullian, excerpts taken out of context from the writings of Paul and others became entrenched in both the church and Western Culture.¹¹⁸ I concur with Sweeny on this matter because the residual impact upon the writings of Augustine and misunderstanding of the text in the Epistles of Paul are used today to maintain women in a state of oppression in many churches. Therefore with the redaction of the Bible throughout the centuries, the status and role of women in the church, though their stories remain, they are often downplayed in the text and in the preaching and biblical teaching.

Therefore we have to piece together the story of Tabitha to fully grasp the meaning of her life, death and resurrection based on what was going on in the world of the text, reading between the lines to gain further understanding. The text lets us know she was a working woman because of her craft. Women came to her in need of her skills. Widows came to her when their garments needed mending or they just needed a new garment. Maybe they came for good food and conversation. Maybe they just needed someone to care; a place of peace; or a shoulder to lay their head.

¹¹⁷ Sweeny, *Women in Judaism*, 5.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 121-22.

The text states that upon her death, they sent for Peter, “imploring him not to delay in coming to them.” The term in the Greek translation is *parahleo*, meaning to call for with strong force.¹¹⁹ Peter, who was in Lydda at the time, had to travel 22 km, 13.67 miles to Joppa by foot. It would have taken maybe three to four hours to get there.

Upon Peter’s arrival, the widows were showing him the garments she had made for them and telling of all of the good things she had done. Not once is it mentioned that anyone did something for Tabitha, other than wash her dead body and place it in the upper room. Had it occurred to anyone while she was alive to do something good for her? Had anyone inquired about the possibility that Tabitha could have used some assistance? After all the text tells us that she *was full of*—in the Greek it translates very filled with, complete. Often times when one is very filled with, or abounding in an activity, they will do it to the point of exhaustion. The text does not mention that she had very much if any help from others in the community. Could it be that she had taken on this task of caring for those in her community alone?

I grapple with why they sent for Peter. It could not just be because he was a few hours away. Possibly because the disciples heard he had healed Aeneas in Lydda, (Acts 9:32-35), and possibly could do something for Tabitha . . . but she was already dead. Did they think that he could resurrect her? The woman had died. Death is after all a natural process in life and considered final. This story resonates of the resurrection of Lazarus, (John 11:1-45). For Lazarus was dead for four days, Tabitha was four hours deceased, and both Peter and Jesus after praying to God life was restored. Was it for the mere

¹¹⁹ *The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, s.v. “parahleo.”

showing to the people the glory of God? Who was this woman that made men run to seek help?

There are two ways of answering this question. The first one is from my perspective as a Womanist theologian. It is quite simple. Tabitha was the leader of her community of faith. She was the one who cared for and ministered to the poor and widows through her acts of charity and kindness. Hers was a ministry to the marginalized. She fed and clothed them. She comforted them when they were sick. She provided money for them from what she had, and as her name means in Aramaic, a gazelle, a small antelope of Africa and Asia that is graceful with lustrous eyes, she did so without seeking recognition, with poise and radiance. She was following the teachings of Jesus Christ by seeing the needs of *the least of these*, (Matthew 25:34-40).

Upon her death, the community would have been in a state of chaos and in need of new leadership. By sending for Peter, the head of the church, quite possibly they could have been looking to him for an answer to their dilemma. Her physical resurrection would have immediately resolved the problem as well as show the power of God to those who did not believe, thus increasing the numbers of those who believed.

A second rationale for Peter coming also deals with resurrection, but more so in the metaphysical sense. Resurrection according to Charles Fillmore's *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary* is defined as:

The raising of wo/man's mind and body from the sense to spiritual consciousness . . . resurrection lifts up all faculties of mind until they conform to the absolute ideas of Divine Consciousness, and this renewal of the mind makes a complete transformation of the body so that every function works in divine order and every cell become incorruptible and immortal. The resurrection is an organic change that takes place daily in all who are conforming their lives to the regenerating Truth of Jesus

Christ. The resurrection takes place in the here and now in all who conform their lives to the spiritual law under which it works.¹²⁰

From the metaphysical perspective, there is more to resurrection of the human body than is literally read in the text. However, once the community encountered the resurrected Tabitha, a transformation took place and their lives were changed so they too could bear witness to the liberating freedoms brought about by the miracles and teachings of Jesus.

I also examined this text from the view of Liberal theology which strives to liberate congregations from unenlightened attitudes. Richard Allen contends, "...core aspects of the Bible and Christian doctrine contain elements that are not objectively true. Some of these elements misrepresent reality and move in the direction of superstition."¹²¹ Liberal theology demystifies the Bible. Beneath the myths and miracles, there is an encounter with an enduring meaning. Thus, the resurrection was not so much of the body of Tabitha but more so of her Christ Consciousness within the community. All who accepted and believed in the Way were expected to live and act in the same manner that Tabitha had; whether she had been physically resurrected or not is no longer the issue under liberal theology, her spirit of love and care for others would eternally live on. The church in Joppa continued to grow and spread among the people.

But somehow, through it all, the women of the early church were able to survive and the church thrived. That was then. But we are living in the here and now, and thus, is the time frame of the reading of this text.

¹²⁰ Charles Fillmore, *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary* (Lexington, KY: Wilder Publications, 2015), 571-72.

¹²¹ Richard J. Allen, *Thinking Theologically* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 24.

Not much has changed in our time. Women in the urban community are still under the pressures, though not as extreme, of the women in the early church. Violence, disease, poverty, poor housing and overcrowding in the urban communities still plague us and the government continues to turn a limited-sighted eye to the ills of our world. The majority of our households are headed by women. Although many of us work, we are at the lower end of the pay scale and sometimes the need to go to work is a forced necessity to maintain our families.

Oftentimes we as Black women think about how bad we've got it. Let's face it we are caught up in a world of racism, classism, sexism, ageism . . . the isms are too numerous to name. African Americans face racial profiling, leading to unjustified arrest, incarceration and in many cases death at the hands of those put in charge to maintain the peace. There is no wonder why we are stressed out by whatever "ism" we find ourselves in. But we do not have to let them be the bane of our existence. As Black women, it is in our DNA to be resilient. We have to find new and creative ways of resistance and resilience when dealing with the stress, the "isms", and the plight we find ourselves in.

It's time to stop saying "how bad we got it," and start looking at how good we have it. We have the power through the Creator Spirit of God that dwells within us to persevere and not only survive but be victorious in any situation or circumstance. All it takes is a mustard seed of faith, hope for a better tomorrow, and the creativity to make it happen.

A random survey was done among Christian women as to who they thought Tabitha was and what she must have been like. Many women felt she was a teacher. That being a disciple of Christ, a follower of The Way, she would gather women at her home

and talk about God, Jesus, the church and other issues affecting them as women of God as she sewed their tunics and garments. But while she was stitching together their outer garments she was mending together the inner garment or mantle of their souls, they were being Spirit-led and Spirit-fed with the teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Thus, as a community of believers, women must gather at the table and do the same. Through discussions of the Bible, the teachings of Christ, the sharing of stories as they can sit and stitch together quilts, that will become the mantle that bring healing and transformation the mind, body and soul. In these stressful times, from stress-filled lives, the need to come together to share in joys and pains of life, knowing that God can heal becomes an imperative for Black women.

I can recall the kitchen table gatherings, where momma would go by your God mother's house and it would be three or four other sisters from the church and they would discuss life's issues. All the while they'd be sipping a good cup of coffee, freshly brewed in an old metal percolator over a gas stove that you had to light with a match. It was so rich and creamy from Pet Milk and sweetened with Domino's sugar. Or working on the robes for the Junior Choir. Or maybe just waiting for their soap opera "Days of our Lives," or "All My Children," to come on.

Some called it a war council when they dealt with serious matters. They dealt with issues ranging from so-and-so's daughter was pregnant and she need to be married; Sistah girl's husband been beating on her and we need to get her outta there be'fo he kill her; that boy locked up again and what his mamma be going through; we need to take some food over to Mother X because she been sick . . . the list of conversation topics go on. But the major commonality within the conversations was there are problems in the

community. Some woman somewhere needed help and the women gathered to think of a creative way to help them out.

Then there are the “Hen Parties.” Though they were still dealing with serious matters, they were on the lighter side of life. It was common for the women to gather when a young woman was about to be married, have tea and crumpets, and give advice about marriage and children . . . bridal showers and baby showers are two types of Hen Parties. And although today, men may attend, back in the day, the men dare not enter the room.

Then sometimes women gathered just to have a good laugh. You know there is a saying my father had: “All Black people can sing, dance and clown.” It took me all of my childhood and most of my adult life to figure out what he meant. Basically he was saying in whatever times we are living in, Black people always have a song in their hearts, a dance in their steps and can have a good laugh in the face of adversity. How ironic it seems, but sometime the more mess a sistah has experienced in her life the funnier her story and the greater the laughter. Although she could be crying inside, the laughter is cathartic. It also is a signal to other women that if you are going through something, you can make it through and still keep your joy and laughter.

This project was specifically designed to get the creative essences flowing, while dealing with some of the issues that lead to Cumulative Lifetime Stress. It is about healing and transforming your life through the art of quilting and the gathering of women. It is about developing and strengthening relationships through fellowship. How does it work you might ask? Simple, just as Tabitha sat with the women at her table, and held a conversation about the goodness and love of God through the teachings of Jesus

Christ, the spirit of Tabitha is called forth each week to engage women in conversation and sewing as they reconnect the fibers of their lives.

CHAPTER 8

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

Out of the fifteen areas for ministerial growth and development reviewed by the Advisory Group during the proposal phase of this demonstration project, I selected four specific areas to further develop based upon their recommendations and my growth in the art of preaching and biblical engagement. They are:

1. Theologian – As a theologian, it will be necessary for this project to be able to not only actively engage biblical study and theological reflection but also have a working knowledge and understanding of secular disciplines. This project involves looking at political, educational, economic and psychological issues within the African American community.
2. Preacher – I am new to ministry and at this point am in the process of developing my delivery style. In the sermon series to be developed I want to explore different delivery styles and methods that will make the most impact on the listener and facilitate their spiritual growth and development.
3. Leader – It is a responsibility of a spiritual leader to motivate others to achieve their best. This project facilitates not only motivation for success but a means to self-motivate, motivate others and creatively find ways and means to achieve their goals.

4. Use of Technology: It is imperative that I become more proficient in the use of technology. This will save me valuable time if I am able to maximize the use of my personal computer.

Theologian

During the summer of 2014, I was assigned to teach Bible study to the women at the church that required me to study the Bible with intensity for the year. I began teaching from the Book of Acts, but during the Advent Season, switched to the Gospel of Luke, specifically focusing on the birth narrative and moving through the text over the next four months up to the ministry of Jesus. In March 2015, the pastor decided to reassign Bible study to another minister who had come through the Lily Foundation for pastoral internship who needed experience teaching. I intentionally taught from my hermeneutics as a Womanist Theologian, utilizing the racially charged current events of the time which was inclusive of social and political issues. During the class we explored the political climate of the community and psychological issues that impacted women.

Two of the issues that I wanted to emphasize the most were the need for fellowship and sisterhood among the women. In a church the size of St. Paul, it is easy for new members to get lost in the crowd. The women were challenged to introduce themselves each Sunday and pray with a woman they did not know. This was reinforced by the Chief Prayer Intercessor, Queen Mother Sarah Plowden. This made new sisters feel welcomed into the congregation as well as promoted fellowship amongst believers and further participation in ministries within the church.

Focusing my project, and my exegetical research on Acts 9: 36-43 for the past two years has given me insight on this text and how it relates to women today from several different perspectives. I learned that Luke, the presumed author of Acts, was keen

on pairing together pericopes of women and men together in a chapter. Tabitha's resurrection in Joppa is paired with Aeneas's healing in Lyyda by Peter, (Acts 9:32-35), thereby showing equality and importance of both women and men in the community of Christ. This removes the patriarchal tone taken by the Bible and Western Christianity, although the women's stories tend to get buried in the text. It requires deeper study and a discerning hermeneutical lens to pull the women's stories out of the text.

Much of learning about the women of the early church is like piecing together a quilt. By understanding the scraps that one can pull together from the world behind the text, the world within the text, and the world in front of the text, it becomes possible to piece together the fabrics to make a complete story. In essence, the quilt becomes a metaphor on how to piece together women's stories throughout the biblical text.

In June of 2014, I attended the Hampton University Ministers Conference as part of the course requirement for the Preaching Cohort of the Doctor of Ministry Degree. I attended the lecture series presented by Dr. Cynthia James explored how the Gospel of John uses the miracles of Jesus as parables that reveals truths to those who have ears to hear – that point to something else. When you study the narratives, you can see that an event or miracle is unfolding. There are certain indicators throughout the text that will indicate that something is going to happen. There must be an understanding of the conditions and traditions of the time. The biblical text will use ordinary items to create an extraordinary event.¹²² I used this information to write a sermon entitled “Doing the It,” (Appendix I).

¹²² Cynthia James, “What is Embedded in the Text” (Lecture, Hampton University Ministers Conference, June 4, 2014).

This demonstration project has also has given more credence to the further development of *Sistahology*, because it is documented proof that women of color, no matter how broken, can come together in the name of God, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit and be made whole.

Preacher

Over the past two years, I have been trying out different methods of sermon delivery. I interviewed the Rev. Dr. Albert C. Bernstein, who advised me to always develop a thesis then an antithesis to base my sermons on. It is about what you should do and if you fail to do it, what will happen and then you base your sermon from there.¹²³ (See Appendix L.)

Dr. James Forbes presented a lecture on “The Preacher as Healer” at the Hampton University Ministers Conference. As Ministers of the Gospel, “each of us must have a healing ministry – you just have to find your place.”¹²⁴ He used Luke 4:18 to demonstrate what it is we have been called to do.

I took a preaching intensive with Dr. Valerie Bridgeman at New York Theological Seminary the summer of 2014 as well. She emphasized that we must read the text, who is in the text, what is emphasized in the text, and what is the text really saying. She always stressed, “Preach what is in the text.”¹²⁵ (See Appendix K.)

My Pastor, Rev. David Brawley gave me critiques on my sermons. He told me to try something different, including poetry and repetition in the sermons.

¹²³ Albert Bernstein, interview by author, Brooklyn, NY, April, 2014.

¹²⁴ James Forbes, “The Preacher as Healer” (Lecture, Hampton University Ministers Conference, June 4, 2014).

¹²⁵ Valerie Bridgeman, “Woman Preach” (Lecture, New York Theological Seminary, June 14, 2014).

I attended the Women of Color in Ministry Conference preaching intensive with Martha Simmons and learned about putting more energy and power into my sermon delivery. (See Appendix L.)

I am still in the learning process of developing my style. While the opportunity to preach within my church is infrequent, I do spend time writing and practicing sermons and have been invited to other churches to deliver the Word. In order to help develop myself, I preached a sermonette at the beginning of each of the Quilting Circles. They are included at the beginning of each circle in chapter on implementation. Each sermonette was from five to ten minutes. It met the goal of facilitating the spiritual growth and development of the participants.

I am able to develop a sermon best when I've sat with the Scripture for a good week. The text must be read, and then re-read, until there is an understanding what is going on in the text, in front of the text and behind the text in order to deliver a theologically sound sermon. However, most importantly, the power of the Holy Spirit has to rain down on me while writing the sermon in order for it to deliver the intended message. For it is not my will but God's will that must be done.

Leader

I believe the completion and continuation of this demonstration project has definitely established me as a leader. A leader must have courage to push forward when other forces are pushing back. Even in times when discouraged, the Divine power of God spoke to my soul and encouraged me to keep on moving. For how could I motivate and encourage others if I could not achieve the same for myself? Over the past two years I have spearheaded several projects at my church as the Coordinator of Congregational Care Ministries.

As a leader, I have learned to work with a team. It is impossible to do all of the work that is needed in the Kingdom of God without others to assist. As a leader, one must be able to encourage others to come out of their comfort zones to accomplish the work. Three of the Voices of Tabitha had never taken on the role as facilitator of any discussion group. The majority of the Sistahs who sat at Tabitha's Table had never made a quilt, let alone sewn anything.

This also taught me that in leadership you will be under the gun. However, when you are doing God's work, neither Satan nor his adversaries can stop you. For Isaiah 54: 14 states, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise up against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."

Use of Technology

I am still in the process of mastering the use of my computer. I have been able to complete this dissertation on my own. I have learned that if there is something that I do not know how to do on my computer to Google it. I attended several Resource Day seminars at New York Theological Seminary that have been most helpful in this process.

CHAPTER 9

REFLECTION ON THE EXPERIENCE

As I reflect upon the experience of the demonstration project from conception to actual birth, tears come to my eyes. This has truly been a journey of faith. I was obedient to God's call to continue my education and even to the point when it was advised that I consider changing the venue. There were women waiting for this project and in need of healing. The East New York community which I served so many years as a Community Health Nurse, needed to be made aware of Cumulative Lifetime Stress which was killing so many of my sisters. The power of God and the work of the Holy Spirit that created quilts through me had saved me from the heart attack that the doctor had anticipated. There are plans to continue Conversations at Tabitha's Table through other venues, but St. Paul Community Baptist Church was the place that I had to start.

During the second semester of my first year of the Doctor of Ministry program, I fell and broke my ankle. I lost almost everything because I had no income coming in during my recovery. I had just started a new job, had no sick time, and fell in my apartment building. However, I did not lose my faith. Knowing God would see me through, I persevered and tried to keep my wits about me, completing all that was required of me. The Sistahs of St. Paul blessed me financially as well as friends and family. I was able to keep my phone, lights and cable on during that time. I received my healing through researching, preparing and implementing this program. There was so

much that had been taken for granted in my own life that this experience caused me to deeply examine.

One of the issues was the ministry that God really called me to do. The climate at my church had changed and the place where I thought my ministry would be nurtured and flourish had turned cold. Depression set in and I had to take it to God in prayer. God did answer, saying, “Do the ministry that I gave you.” My focus had shifted from working on the demonstration project to work in the church – some of which I should have said “NO” to. So I directed my attention to nurturing and growing in ministry myself, attending seminars, taking continuing education classes, preaching intensives, and conferences.

On a trip home for Christmas in 2014, I reconnected with my church of birth in Detroit, Michigan, New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Temple, where the Rev. L. J. London is pastor. I had not been there since I left for college thirty-five years ago. When they welcomed the visitors, after standing and introducing myself as Minister Pamela Jones, the pastor’s son recognized me, along with some of the women I grew up knowing in the church. I was invited to preach there for the New Year’s Eve service by Rev. London. I preached, “Doing the It,” which I had preached previously at my church. It was well received and Pastor London told me that anytime I came home they would welcome me to preach again – which I did this past New Year’s Eve.

I attended the forum that my cohort, Debbie Williams facilitated for her demonstration project for support of women in ministry. I took home some valuable lessons:

1. You've got to know that you know, that you know you have been called by God and expect God to make a way.
2. Choose your battles because the battle is not yours it's the Lord's. Let God fight your battles.
3. There is power in silence. When you are silent you leave adversaries guessing. You can observe what is going on around you and work in silence.

I attended the Women of Color in Ministry Conference in Atlanta, Georgia this past summer. There was so much encouragement for me to press on in the ministry. Dr. Martha Simmons advised me to get my “brand” together; to put myself out there. The website for Conversations at Tabitha’s Table is in the process of being developed.

Women in ministry must stick together. The “Old Boys Club” is alive and well and if sister ministers do not connect and start caring for one another and giving support the stained glass ceiling will be harder to break.

Whenever I feel stressed out, I create. I worked on my own interpretive quilt at Tabitha’s Table. The color of my pain is blue. Whenever my life is feeling like it is falling apart, I look up to the sky and it is always the most beautiful blue and the sun is shining. The sun in my quilts always represents the Spirit of God. The flower I chose was a cockle, a weed. All of God’s creation is beautiful, even if it is a weed; there is beauty in that weed, because God created it. And all things God creates are good. It is from Job 31:40 which states, “then let briers come up instead of wheat and stinkweed instead of barley.” You can throw whatever you want to at me Satan, I will still put all of my trust and faith in God. It reminded me of the chaos in my life after breaking my ankle, which

slows down my walking, but does not deter me from walking in the path the Lord has laid before me.

My childhood memory is a picture of my cousin Rhonda and me playing the Miss Black America Pageant at the beach. When I was a child I felt bad because I was dark skinned and had soft hair that drew up in the humidity. Lighter skinned African-American girls were favored over me in school. It was not until I became a radical young woman that I began to accept my outward appearance as beautiful. It was not what was on the outside that makes you beautiful but what is on the inside. On the pocket of truth I wrote the word "Courage." 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 states, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in Love" This is to remind me that this faith journey God has put me on requires that I do not fear.



The
enemy will
try to hold
you back,
but you
must stand
firm and
press on
with
courage.
My name
on the quilt

represents who I am. It reads, “Pamela Denise: You are relaxed, chill, and very likely to go with the flow. You are light hearted and accepting. You don’t get worked up easily.

Well-adjusted and incredibly happy. Many people wonder what your secret to life is.”

Well my secret is life is what you make it. As long as you love God, have a relationship with God, and let go and let God work things out for you, it will be alright. The *Gye Nyame*, an Adinkra symbol from Ghana, represents the omnipotence of God. The Image of myself is seated in meditation and conversation with God. Since breaking my ankle, I sit more than I stand because it will swell if I stand for too long. The picture of me just sitting and listening, means, “Be still, and know that I AM God.”

Where do I go from here? Well, it will be wherever God leads me. I will be running another workshop starting in January 30, 2016 at St. Paul’s. The Sistahs who sat at Tabitha’s Table have been resurrected to become the new Voices of Tabitha. The focus will be on healing relationships.

However, I did meet with “The We Sew Love Quilting Circle” of New Prospect Church in Detroit, Michigan. These women have been quilting together and doing community service projects for over fifteen years. If I move back to Detroit after graduation, they are willing to work with me on starting Conversations at Tabitha’s Table throughout the Detroit Metropolitan area.

I have been blessed and healed by this experience of sharing what God has gifted to me as a ministry. I have gained a deeper understanding of my Sistahs of Color as well as myself. I have learned God will heal all wounds, whether they are physical, mental or spiritual. It is life piecing together a quilt. All that has to be done is to gather the women together in a fellowship of the love of God, and *Reconnecting the Fabrics of our Lives*.

CHAPTER 10 CONCLUSION

“Reconnecting the Fabrics of our Lives: Healing through the Creative Spirit through the Interpretive Quilting,” has impacted the lives of the women at St. Paul Community Baptist Church, as well as other women of faith who came to Tabitha’s Table. By raising the awareness of the women to the issue of Cumulative Lifetime Stress and the physical and mental diseases that result from it, they are now conscious of its reality and can learn to make better choices regarding the diet, exercise, sexual activity, and other choices regarding their health. They have also learned that in order to de-stress sometimes you just have to use your creative imagination and do something different, like make a quilt. Certain diseases can be reduced among African American women by decreasing the dis-ease of their lives.

The triple jeopardy of racism, classism and sexism cannot be taken for granted as factors impacting African-American women’s health. By understanding that it does exist, that we have been sold a bill of bad goods in America, the problem of divide and conquer can be seen for what it is among Black women. There is a need for African-American women to gather and discuss the issues that are prevalent in their lives and within the urban community. Instead of giving into the problem, we must work creatively towards a solution.

Quilting has been a tradition among African American women since they were brought to the shores of North America. It grew out of the necessity for warmth and

comfort, and today has become an art form. Communities, such as Gees Bends, Alabama have been able to save their homes and property through making quilts. It has shown love and caring throughout African American literature. During slavery, it guided those who sought freedom through the Underground Railroad. It has brought women together in fellowship through quilting bee's and circles. Our quilts do not look like the quilts of the oppressor. They are rich and vibrant, full of life and color, just as varied as we are as a people. Our quilts tell the stories of our ancestors and years gone by. They are our memory boards to recall events and people in our lives. They bring healing in knowing that someone loved you enough to make you a quilt.

By using the story of Tabitha, her life, death and resurrection, this project has not only looked at the work that must be done first on each and every woman that came to the table to heal. It shows that the work of the Kingdom cannot be done alone; it takes the community of women to come together and draw out their creative spirits to heal. The saying goes, "if you heal a woman, you heal a nation," is represented here. It was not so much about resurrecting the physical body of Tabitha but her spirit of creativity and good works for others that brings a community back to its feet.

Conversations at Tabitha's Table let women come together in a safe space and talk out their issues and stressors. It taught them to bring out the creative spirit within themselves, to take their minds off of their troubles by redirecting their focus. While sitting quietly at home completing their work, they were able to think thing through as opposed to just reacting. However, most importantly, they learned that they are not alone in their struggles. There is always a sister who is going through something and we have to come tougher and guide one another as women out of our dilemmas in life. All are

welcomed at the table. And we all have within us the power of the Creator God, in whose image and likeness we are made. All it takes is gathering together all of the ripped and torn shreds of our lives, trim off the rough and frayed edges through the power of the Word, and reconnect the fabrics of our lives!

APPENDIXES

Appendix A
Demonstration Project Proposal

RECONNECTING THE FABRICS OF OUR LIVES:
HEALING THROUGH THE CREATIVE SPIRIT THROUGH INTERPRETIVE
QUILTING
BY
PAMELA D. JONES

DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL
New York Theological Seminary
2015

CHALLENGE STATEMENT

I am a Minister of the Gospel at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church, a community health nurse with over twenty years of experience, and a master quilt artist serving in the East Brooklyn New York area, one of the most impoverished communities in New York City. Due to the traumatic experiences that often accompany urban life, many women suffer from what is known *cumulative lifetime stress* which leads to psychosomatic and physical disease. This demonstration project will develop and implement an interpretive quilting process that will guide participants through a healing journey.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

*“What’s in a Quilt?
You look at my quilt with a quizzical eye,
Remark on its beauty and ask
If it’s worth all the time and work that it took
To complete such a painstaking task.
“T’was a labor of love, “I try to explain
A means to express what I feel
And preserve for the future some small part of me
That everyday life may conceal.
Into its patches I’ve stitched all the thoughts,
The dreams, the struggles, the fights,
The gladness, the sadness, the joy and the pain,
And the search for beauty and rights.
It’s a simple quilt, really, just pieced out of scraps
In a pattern I worked out one day.
I sorted and pondered before I began,
And finally arranged it this way... ”¹*

Quilting saved my life! I am a single African American mother trying to survive in the urban area of East Brooklyn New York. As a resident of this community, I was not immune to the effects of the stresses of life. I was a survivor of domestic and intimate partner violence, overworked, underemployed, unemployed, living between a weed spot and a crack house, raising two children, and emotionally traumatized. It was no wonder I was diagnosed with Hypertension at age 35 and told I was looking at a heart attack by the time I was 40 if I did not make a conscious effort to de-stress myself and change my life-style. That is when I decided to slow down, eat a balanced diet, lay off the Pepsi,

¹ Fiorenza, *Empowering Memory*, 1.

cigarettes and whatever else substance consumed to placate or suppress my stress and started quilting.

I found quilting to be very relaxing. I could sit for hours and work on a quilt and let my mind soar away from my problems and worries. I also began an exercise program and eliminated all drinks containing caffeine and began to drink only water. Quilting time was meditation time. I would not allow any distractions.

About a year later, when I went for my annual physical, I had lost 20 pounds, was smiling more, and my blood pressure was within normal limits. In 2005, I joined the Maafa Quilters, which was the quilting ministry the St. Paul Community Baptist Church. Joining the ministry placed me in the company of positive sisters who had found their healing through quilting. I quickly moved up the ranks as a master quilter in art or interpretive quilting. Since that time, my quilts have been displayed throughout the New York Metropolitan area. I was called upon to teach workshops on the artistic methods I used for quilting. Combining quilting with biblical study at my church, I produced my first collection of work, which I entitled, "Women of the Bible." The second collection, "Parables in Cloth," was exhibited at Harvard University in 2008. In 2009 I became the lead instructor for Black Men who Quilt, the ministry for desired to learn the art of quilting at the church. In 2010, I curated a quilt exhibition with the art quilts produced by the Maafa Quilters and Black Men who Quilt, entitled "The Common Thread," at the National Art Gallery in Addis Abba, Ethiopia in 2010.

The art of quilting gives one the sense of satisfaction from the creative process and, in particular, problem solving, working with colors and being able to lose themselves in their work. It also provides socialization, sharing tips and the inspiration

from seeing other people's work.² It not only aided in the lowering of my blood pressure, but also gave me a new venue or opportunity to see a brighter side to life. I have shared my craft with women and men from not only my community but other urban areas as well and now it is time to put the research and proof of the healing power of the Spirit of Creativity through quilting into practice.

The Venue

St. Paul Community Baptist Church is located in the East New York section of Brooklyn New York. Some consider it the "Heart and Soul of East New York" because it is the largest congregations in the area that directly serves the Eastern Brooklyn communities and beyond, priding itself on being an agent of change.³

The Ministry at St. Paul Community Baptist Church has eight ministries that are directly involved with providing Christian education and witness, support, care and service to the members of the congregation. They are The Jewel (Women's) Ministry, the Eldad-Medad Men's Medallion Ministry, (which Black Men who Quilt fall under), Team Q (youth ministry), Congregational Care, (under which the Maafa Quilters fall), New Life Ministry (Discipleship), the Deaf Ministry, Daytime Ministry, and the Sacred Arts Ministry, which is comprised of the choir(Voices of St. Paul), Praise team, Voices of Hope (youth choir), Unity Dancers (for the women) and Eldad-Medad Dancers (for the men).⁴

² E. L. Burt, and J. Atkinson, "The relationship between quilting and wellbeing," *Journal of Public Health* (June 5 2011), <http://www.nhs.uk/news/2011/06June/Pages/quilting-and-wellbeing.aspx> (accessed October 9, 2014).

³ St. Paul Community Baptist Church Overview, <http://spcbc.com/overview> (accessed February 12, 2014).

⁴ St. Paul Community Baptist Church Ministries, <http://www.spcbc.com/ministries> (accessed February 12, 2014).

St. Paul Community Baptist Church has a history of promoting culture, creativity and social justice. The mission of the church is actively involved in programs to build affordable housing, (Nehemiah Project), improve the condition of public housing, advocating for the immediate repairs of deplorable conditions that previously went unaddressed by HPD. The church is a principal member in Metro IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation), which is spearheading this problem. Metro IAF in conjunction with the church hosted several forums and mayoral debates addressing this problem and several other concerns of people within the city of New York such as discrimination by NYPD with “Stop and Frisk,” and violence and gun control in marginalized communities.

The church had maintained its own private school to provide quality education to the children in the community. In the past four years it has been converted to an all-boys charter school partly for economic reasons in order for the school to remain viable and partly the lead pastor’s vision that young boys need to be educated in an environment that specifically met their needs.

During the summer, the church has a “Freedom School” for the children in the community. There is a reading program, field trips and they learn more about their history and culture. The program provides nutritious meal for the children in addition to employment opportunities for young adults as consolers and junior counselors.

Recently, the pastor went to Germany with other area pastors to address the gun manufacturers about controlling the sale of guns in our communities. Real progress is yet to be made in this endeavor, however, the manufacturers at least know that the people are angry and want to hold these manufacturers accountable for the irresponsible sales of their products.

One of the greatest experiences of God, our relationship to God as a people and connection to the spirituality of our ancestors is the Commemoration of the Maafa, (the Great Tragedy). This high holy week for the church is celebrated the third week in September remembers those souls that were lost during the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade as well as those who survived the devastation of enslavement in the Americas. Speakers come from around the world to educate the congregation on aspects of our heritage, the world we live in, facts in history, the list goes on. A psycho-drama is presented during this time in which the philosophy of Sankofa is recognized: to go back and get it, or as the Pastor Emeritus, Rev. Dr. Johnny Ray Youngblood stated, “the way out is back through.”

Throughout the year the congregation is engaged in Spirit charged worship services. On Sundays there are three services and on Wednesday there is a Noon Day One Hour Watch and at 7:00 pm, People in Prayer Service. Revival is held twice a year, during Vespers or Holy Week and then Spring Revival.

It is difficult for me to explain how the members experience God in their daily lives because there is a divide in the congregation. However, when I first became active in the ministry at St. Paul, we were taught morning meditation, prayer and anointing to prepare oneself spiritually. We honored the ancestors who came before us with the highest ancestor being Jesus Christ. We maintained a strong spiritual bond to our history and culture. Now, we have more new members who are coming from the surrounding community that do not possess a strong historical and cultural understanding of our African roots. Many of them are experiencing church for the first time and are trying to grasp an understanding of Jesus and how to develop their relationship with him.

Although our tradition and denomination is Baptist, we do not have deacons, but elders as in the AME church. We have kneelers like in the Catholic Church. We serve communion on second Sundays, Wednesdays and anytime the pastor feel it is needed.

Theology

The theology of St. Paul is a bit complex. It is a combination of Black Liberation, Conservative, and Traditional African theology combined. I feel Pastor Brawley is on the path to develop a new spin on theology, a Theology of Advocacy. Between his work with Metro IAF and leading the push to hold gun manufactures accountable for the sale of their weapons, he is advocating for the community in which the church psychically exist. The ministry is not just concerned with meeting the needs of the congregation, but the community in which it sits. Some of the people in the East New York and Brownsville sections of Brooklyn have probably never set foot in St. Paul, yet the effects of the ministry and call to action by the pastor, inspired by God, positively impacts their lives in a positive manner. Community based programs, such as The Gideon Project, which advocated for the successful and long overdue repairs of resident apartments in public housing has brought many of the residents in the community into the church. Pastor Brawley affectionately referred to as the “Pastor of the Projects,” Brooklyn Public Housing.

Congregation and Community Demographics

St. Paul is located in Community District 5 which encompasses East New York, Highland Park, New Lots, Spring Creek, and Starrett City. The population in 2010 was 182,896. Out of this number 51.2% receive some form of public assistance. Over 75% of the housing units in this area are multiple family dwellings. Median income is

\$26,503.00. Roughly 28.9% of families live below the poverty level, with 41% of these families from households headed by single with children.⁵

The congregation to date numbers about 3000, with 20% men, 65% women and 25% youth under 19 years of age.⁶

The future continues to look bright for the St. Paul Community Baptist Church. They are currently responsible for the construction of an 84 unit senior housing in East New York. They continue to be on the forefront of political actions that fight for improvement of the quality of life in the community. The pastor wants to develop a training and mentoring program to new ministers. He is also looking to open an all-girls charter school and community center.

The church is now in a second transition, as the Lead Pastor establishes his Call from God as under shepherd of the community. The congregation has become comfortable with his leadership and has grown to love and respect him in his role, as the marriage between pastor and his people becomes solidified. He continues to foster the teaching of the congregation to take on leadership and responsibility for the church and community. One of his goals for the church in 2015 is restoration of the health and wellness of the congregation. Programs that will improve the overall mental, physical and spiritual health of the congregations are being incorporated into the church's curriculum, making this proposal and demonstration project of this nature applicable for meeting their needs for ways to improve their health status. With such vision and calling, whatever the future holds for St. Paul, it will be momentous.

⁵ Community Data Brooklyn District 5 accessed 3/29/2014 at http://www.nyc.gov/html/neigh_info/bk05_info.shtml

⁶ St. Paul Community Baptist Church History accessed 04/01/2014 at SBCBC.com/church history.

CHAPTER 2 PRELIMINARY

CHALLENGE STATEMENT

I am a Minister of the Gospel at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church, a community health nurse with over twenty years of experience, and a master quilt artist serving in the East Brooklyn New York area, one of the most impoverished communities in New York City.⁷ Due to the traumatic experiences that often accompany urban life, many women suffer from what is known as *cumulative lifetime stress* which leads to psychosomatic and physical disease.⁸ This demonstration project will develop and implement an interpretive quilting process that will guide participants through a healing journey.

As a single African American mother trying to survive in urban America today, I have resided in the East Brooklyn area for the past 25 years. During that time, I have worked as a community health nurse for about 20 years specifically in service to this area. During my years of serving this community through various community health agencies, I discovered that many of the women who were assigned to me suffered from a tremendous amount of stress. This was evident though the majority of them suffering from hypertension, obesity, cardiovascular disease and the physical deterioration from substance abuse. Many of these women were single parents, welfare recipients, living below the poverty level in public or section 8 housing. Some were survivors of domestic or intimate partner violence, recovering addicts, had significant others who were incarcerated, and the list of traumatic experiences could go on. Overall, what they all had in common was the experience of stress caused by the trauma of living in an urban area.

⁷ NYC Planning, <http://www.maps.NYC.gov/census> (accessed September 25, 2014).

⁸ Crofford "Violence, Stress, and Somatic Syndromes" *Trauma, Violence, Abuse*, vol. 8(3) July 2007. <http://tva.sagepub.com/content/8/3/229> (accessed October 7, 2014): 299-313.

“Genetic susceptibility and lifetime environmental exposures play a role in creating vulnerability to disease.”⁹ The *Journal of Trauma, Violence and Abuse* refers to this as *Cumulative lifetime stress.*¹⁰

Urban life comes with urban stress. The Eastern Brooklyn area which is home to three of the most poverty stricken predominately African American communities: East New York 36% poverty rate; Bedford-Stuyvesant with a rate of 30.7%; and Brownsville with the highest, 39.8%.¹¹ The majority of those living in poverty are women. About 46.3% of these households in east New York alone are single female headed households; in Brownsville, 53.4% compared to only 26.4% of the New York Metropolitan area.¹²

Women who find themselves in the traumatic situations of urban life, whether due to circumstances of abandonment, domestic violence, substance abuse, and the like, sometimes suffer from issues of low self-esteem and/or other psychological states.

According to bell hooks, in *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self-esteem*:

“Most discussions of black people and self-esteem start by identifying racism as the sole culprit. Certainly the politics of race and racism impinge on our capacity as black folk to create self-love rooted in healthy self-esteem, sometimes in an absolute and brutal manner. Yet many of us create healthy self-esteem in a world where white supremacy and racism remain the norm. Clearly being victims of racism does not imply that we cannot resist in ways that are an expression of healthy self-esteem. When we study the psychohistory of African Americans it becomes apparent that the foundations of the shaky self-esteem that assaults our sensibilities is rooted in the experience of traumatic violence. Whether it is the emotional violence caused by the pain of abandonment or the violence that is a consequence of domination (whether racism, sexism, or class elitism), it is the

⁹ Leslie J. Crofford, “Violence, Stress, and Somatic Syndromes” in *The Journal of Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, <http://tva.sagepub.com/content/8/3/229>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Concentrated Poverty in New York City,” April 2012 at www.cccnewyork.org/wp-content/publications/cccReport:concentrated poverty, April 1-2012.pdf (accessed September 25, 2014).

¹² “Demographics East New York and Brownsville” at <http://Maps.nyc.gov/census> (accessed September 25, 2014).

normalization of violence in our lives as black people that created the foundation for ongoing trauma reenactment.”¹³

Therefore, while living under the triple jeopardy of racism, sexism, and class elitisms, can impinge upon our capacity as a people to create self-love rooted in healthy self-esteem.¹⁴ The constant and consistent stress of urban living and adaptation to that stress play crucial roles in health. Cumulative lifetime stress has been associated with a number of physiologic changes that have been linked to a group of disorders.¹⁵ Therefore it can be contended that one’s disease with life can over time manifest as disease in the body. However we can rise above the stressors caused by the various “isms” in order to live fruitful and fulfilling lives.

It is my contention that in order for one to change their circumstances, they must first envision a better one. This requires use of the imagination: what will you do different? How will you do it? What will be the steps you take and why? How does this new vision make you feel? When we tap into our creative imaginations, mysteries unfold, miracles happen. You can do the impossible! It requires faith, courage, trusting relationships and most of all love. Love for our family, love for your neighbor, but most of all love for yourself. It is my proposition that when among women in similar situations, under similar circumstances, a bond forms in which they create different ways and means to endure their hardships. This “requires the courage to invest one’s self over a period of time in a relationship that will demand an increasing openness.”¹⁶

¹³ bell hooks, *Rock My Soul*, 21.

¹⁴ S. Rosenfield, “Triple Jeopardy: Mental health at the intersection of gender, race, and class,” review in PubMed.gov, US National Library of Medicine National Institute of Health, June 11, 2012, was against them.

¹⁵ “Violence, Stress, and Somatic Syndromes” at <http://tva.sagepub.com/content/8/3/229> (accessed October 7, 2014).

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 17.

“By virtue of our very creation,” as stated by Christian Koontz in *Connecting Creativity and Spirituality*, “we each have within us the divine energy and sense of direction we need to co-operate with God in creating ourselves and in adding to the richness, diversity, and beauty of the universe. If we could but believe this truth and act upon it, the kingdom of peace and love would become a reality even in our time.”¹⁷ Imagine if each person were able to tap into their divine energy in communities where people have had a history of feeling the impact of marginalization from the upper echelons of this society. True, political, community and church leaders may be instrumental in advocating and rallying the community for change. However, what will the community look like if the residents were able to envision a solution to their problems and advocate those changes for themselves? Even better, once the individual taps into that creative spirit, she joins with other women who have also tapped into their creativity and begin the dialogue and sharing of ideas of how to effect change within their homes and community?

This demonstration project uses the process of creating an art quilt as a means not only to bring forth this divine spirit of creativity buried within each participant, but is also an opportunity for women to come together in fellowship to go through this creative process, which in fact is really a journey back through their individual histories, bringing issues women of color face that cause us to become torn inside and reconnecting the torn pieces into a new creation.

I have chosen to use quilting as the artistic medium not only because I am a master quilter but also because it is a part of African American heritage. During slavery,

¹⁷ Christian Koontz, *Connecting Creativity and Spirituality* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1986), 5.

quilts, as passed down from the oral tradition of enslaved Africans, contained secret encoded messages in different patchwork designs. These quilts hung outside the Underground “Railroad supporters’ homes that signaled a safe haven for them. In the foreword by Dr. Floyd Coleman in *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*, “...enslaved Africans and their descendants were not hapless individuals, but ones who remembered or were taught their past, and through the materials available began to reconstruct themselves in the United States, a new and very restricted environment.”¹⁸ It becomes evident that there was a link between the art of quilt making and the struggle for freedom.

Our struggle for freedom continues today, with the struggle to free ourselves from internalized oppression which causes people of color living in margins of this society to merely maintain or exist. With the emerging of the Spirit of creativity, there comes a release from the shackles of the imagination that breathes new life into dead or dying hopes

¹⁸ Floyd Coleman, “The Importance of the Decorative Arts in African American History” in *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999) 5-6.

CHAPTER 3

PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1 – Raise the awareness of the participants at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church to Cumulative Lifetime Stress among African-American women living in urban areas and its effects on the mind, body and spirit.

Strategy 1: Present a workshop to the women at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church at the Jewel Summit and in the Jewel Collective Meetings on Cumulative Lifetime stress.

Strategy 2: Present a brief lecture during the Jewel Summit to further raise awareness about Cumulative Lifetime Stress and its impact upon the health of African-American women living in urban community.

Strategy 3: Develop and administer a survey to the women of the congregation at St. Paul Community Baptist Church. Analyze the results at the Summit with the assistance of the site team researcher. The results will be shared with the women of the congregation as well as the overall impact on our health.

Evaluation Goal 1: 65% of the women will complete a pre and post questionnaire on their awareness and their susceptibility to the condition. Results will be tabulated immediately by the respondents.

Goal 2 – Develop a team of at least seven but no more than ten women that will help develop an interpretive quilting model and curriculum of study that will be used as a healing process.

Strategy 1: Develop criteria for who will be on the team based on their skill set necessary to complete the curriculum for the model.

Strategy 2: Once the team is selected, orient the team to the project during a one day retreat.

Strategy 3: Develop and implement team building exercises specific to the project.

Evaluation of Goal 2: Solidification of a working team.

Goal 3: Development and implementation of the interpretive quilting model that will promote self-awareness and healing.

Strategy 1: Develop an interpretive quilting process that will metaphorically be used as a means to release from the trauma and stress of their lives.

Strategy 2: Each class session (which will meet weekly), the activity or lesson in the crafting of the quilt will revolve around an issue or relationship that African-American women have lived through, are living through, (or are stuck in) and how it impacted their lives.

Strategy 3: Within the communing of sisters quilting together, instruct them on how to maintain healthy lifestyles and how to use quilting to relieve stress and anxiety.

Strategy 4: Through the process of creating something new and original, the women will feel within their spirit that they awakened a new creature within themselves with the ability to create a better life for themselves.

Evaluation of Goal 3: All participants including the facilitators are expected to complete an interpretive quilt that will represent the reconstruction of their lives. The quilts will be photographed and placed in a book along with the testimonies of the participants for publication. The quilts will also be on display in the church. In addition, a formal evaluation will take place with the pastor and Council of Wise Jewels (Women in Leadership).

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Psychosocial Issue

What is Cumulative Lifetime Stress and its impact among African-American women in urban settings?

The prevalence of this disorder is proportionately high within urban communities.

In some way of triple jeopardy of racism, classism and sexism play strongly in the etiology of this disorder. It can also be due to the stressors that come with the relationships we engage in or disengage from. Certain diseases can be reduced among African-American women by decreasing the di-ease of our lives.

Historical

How has quilting among African American women been used as a creative outlet to benefit the individual quilter and the community as well?

The aim of this research is to show how quilting is a mode to tap into the creative spirit within, empowering people with new ideas and opportunities that foster imaginative means to deal with adversities in life and brings about healing.

Biblical/Theological

How can the story of Dorcas inspire and resurrect women going through issues within their own lives? How does her story empower, resurrect, and breathe new life in women who are facing the challenges of urban life in America?

African American women must be able to recognize themselves in the biblical text. It is not always just the women who are directly addressed, but the impact of their actions as well. Often the accomplishments of women and the impact that it had on the people of God. Their stories get buried in the pages and words of patriarchal text. The story of Dorcas is not only one of finding hope when all seems lost, it is about the resilience we have to come back or be resurrected from any given situation in our lives. This will enlighten women to the power that God has truly gifted us with to move in the Kingdom.

CHAPTER 5 EVALUATION PROCESS

Method of evaluation 1

Each participant will successfully complete a 36 by 42 inch interpretive quilt depicting their healing journey. In addition to this they will provide a written testimony of their journey to be included in book that will collectively tell their stories.

Method of evaluation 2

After the completion of the three month course, the participants will be asked to complete an evaluation of the course as to whether or not it was helpful to them. In this evaluation, participants will be asked to include new ways they have learned to manage their stress and life styles.

Method of evaluation 3

Written testimony of how this program may have impacted their outlook and hope for the future. The same survey that was administered at the beginning of the program will be re-administered and changes noted.

CHAPTER 6 MINISTERIAL COMPENTENCIES

Theologian - The advisory group felt strongly that one of the main focuses for this project that must be developed by the researcher/ candidate is a working knowledge of secular disciplines. Understanding that this program involves not only dealing with mental and physical well-being, but many social issues as well. Referrals will possibly have to be made to other professional who may be better able to assist the participant in meeting their needs for wholeness. There must be a pre-established list of health promotions, social outreach programs, political empowerment workshops, economic development programs, etc...that can direct the participant in the direction they will pursue in the future. The candidate must work on her ability to enable other persons to work through the process of ethical decision making. Issues may come up in which the participants are face with critical decisions that they must make. The Candidate must start to utilize her talent a Community Health Nurse and assist others to make ethical decisions about their lives.

1. Preacher – While it is felt that there is always room for growth when it comes her style of delivery of the Word, the one area that must be further developed is the ability to facilitate growth in discipleship.
2. Worship Leader – The candidate must further develop the ability to make the liturgy come alive for the congregation through her own spiritual and emotional

involvement. She also needs to further develop her knowledge of sacred music and use of other art forms during the service.

3. Prophetic Agent – The Candidate must be able to raise social consciousness among the people. While she possesses a good eye for social justice issues, she must be able to motivate others in the process of seeking social change, to create group ownership, and build or support coalitions.
4. Leader – The candidate displays leadership skills, but must pay close attention to motivating others to achieve their best efforts.
5. Religious Education – The candidate must be more open to dialogue with others. This may come by way of more theological or biblical discussions with other members of the ministerial staff, elders or women in leadership.
6. Counselor- Though the candidate brings her skills in counseling and teaching to the table as a community health nurse, she must pay close attention to recognizing the limits on her own competency as a counselor.
7. Pastor- While the candidate is not currently in a pastor-ship she can develop her skills in pastoring to the congregation through this demonstration project. The main areas she must focus her attention on are : a. Caringly administering the sacraments and ceremonies of the community; b. Spending time with, and comforting those who are bereaved; c. Seeking contact with inactive members; and d. Demonstrating self-care.
8. Spiritual Leader- As a spiritual leader in the St. Paul Community Baptist Church the candidate must be an example to the congregation in observance of spiritual

disciplines such as Sabbath rest, devotion, prayer and fasting. She must intentionally make time for spiritual retreat for refreshment and renewal. She also must grow in her knowledge of the spiritual practices of other times and traditions.

9. Ecumenist - While the candidate already understands a wide variety of faith traditions, she must pay attention to her ability to provide structured opportunities for interdenominational and/or interfaith worship, education, and action. She must also place special attention on the ability to inform the congregation of the needs, concerns and community involvement of other congregations and groups.
10. Witness or Evangelist – There is consensus among the group that the Candidate is proficient in this area and should continue to excel in this area.
11. Administrator – The candidate must further develop her skills as an administrator specifically in the areas of establishing concrete and realistic goals; the ability to work to realize the mission of the whole through the various tasks that form its parts; and handling of details with precision and accuracy.
12. Professional – The group feels that candidate exhibits professionalism in ministry she must continue to develop time management skills and place limits on her workload to what she is able to do and know when to say “no” when it is warranted.
13. Financial Management – All fiscal matters require development. She must develop skills in budgeting and forecasting; she should continue her stewardship; she must learn grant writing; she needs to further develop her understanding of

tax laws; and she must continue to develop her understanding of risk management and the church.

14. Technology/Social Media Management - While the candidate does have a basic understanding of technology and the use of social media, she needs to develop a website for her ministry. She must also collaborate with the media team at the church to utilize the resources that are available to her.

It is my contention that many of the areas that require attention or further development will be strengthened during the course of this demonstration project and experience gained over the next year in ministry. The three specific areas that I have selected to develop upon the recommendation of the Advisory Group are:

1. Theologian – As a theologian, it will be necessary for this project to be able to not only actively engage biblical study and theological reflection but also have a working knowledge and understanding of secular disciplines. This project involves looking at political, educational, economic and psychological issues within the African American community.
2. Preacher – I am new to ministry and at this point am in the process of developing my delivery style. In the sermon series to be developed I want to explore different delivery styles and methods that will make the most impact on the listener and facilitate their spiritual growth and development.
3. Leader – It is a responsibility of a spiritual leader to motivate others to achieve their best. This project facilitates not only motivation for success but a means to

self-motivate, motivate others and creatively find ways and means to achieve their goals.

4. Use of Technology: It is imperative that I become more proficient in the use of technology. This will save me valuable time if I am able to maximize the use of my personal computer.

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1 – Timeline

Date	Participants	Activity
October 17, 2014	Site Team Advisors/Director of Women's Ministry and candidate	Review of proposal and ministerial competencies'/brain storming session
October 28, 2014	Pastor David. K. Brawley and candidate	Review proposal for project
November 14, 2014	Candidate	Submission of draft
November 14, 2014	Council of Wise Jewels, Site team advisors.	Review of draft and brainstorming; selection of team to be developed.
December 2, 2014	Project team	Selection of project team
December 5, 2014-February 1, 2015	Candidate	Submission of final proposal
December 5,2014	Candidate and team to be developed, Council of Wise Jewels	Review project, expectations, ideas, and requirements,
December 6, 2014	Jewel Collective	Introduce Cumulative lifetime stress disorder to the women.
December 12, 2014-January 25, 2015	Candidate and team to meet with main project advisor, Dr. Rita Strickland	Start developing quilting model.
January 2015	1. Resource Day NYTS -01/10 2. Pastor, Council, Team, Advisors and candidate	Learn appropriate use of technology and resources Review of curriculum training for team members
February 2015	NYTS faculty	Approval for project Training for project team

		members.
March 2015	Women who willing to participate; team; candidate	The beginning of the project
March 6, 2015-May 8, 2015	Project team and participants	Workshop – 9 classes total
2015May 10m	Project participants	Exhibition of Quilts
June 2015	Jewel Collective	Jewel retreat, findings of project introduced.
June 2015	Pastor, Council of Wise Jewels, Candidate and team	Evaluation
June 2015-February 2016	Candidate	Book of quilts and testimonies; Completion of dissertation and
May 2016	Participants in program	Quilt exhibit and book release.

Appendix 2 – Budget

Activity	Estimated Expense	Misc. Information
Ice Breaker Supplies	55.00	Lesson on Faith
Quilting Workshop and Lecture	1000.00	This includes Muslin, batting, backing for 30 participants. All other supplies for quilts participants will be asked to supply.
Light refreshments	300.00	May possibly be offset by Jewel Ministry Budget.
Photography	250.00	Cost will depend of photographer. May possibly be offset by the Griot Ministry (Photography) at the church.
Editing of Book for presentation and publishing	1,000	Pray!
Self-Publishing of 106 page book	20-25.00/book	Just a ball park estimate from Gotham Publishers. May look into other means to publish in the future.
Printing of Dissertation and binding	160.00	Based on estimate from Staples
Travel for interviews and workshops, retreats	3000.00	Workshop with New Prospect Baptist Church Quilting Guild; Will be attending “Story Tellers” African American Quilters retreat; Self-imposed retreat for rest, research and writing; Possible Missions trip to teach which will make expense about 2000.00 higher if it can be arranged.
Unexpected Expense	1500.00	

Possible source of financing available through a grant given to the church for domestic violence project and donations from participants and self.

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APPENDIX B
Workshop for Jewel 2015 Grand Summit:
“Caring for Your Body as the Temple of God”

1 Corinthians 6:18- 20New King James Version (NKJV)

“Flee immorality. Every other sin that a human commits is outside the body, but the immoral human sins against her own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you have been brought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

Every pain we as women will ever experience in this life comes through our wombs, or shall I say through our *womb-maness*. I make this statement because throughout our history, women, especially Black women, have been objectified by our bodies and role in procreation. We are the gateway for human-kind into the world. Many of us are the primary care takers of our families. This was seen throughout history as our primary function. It is also used as one of the primary means to abuse us as woman... separation of families, infidelity, rape, preteen and teen sex and pregnancies, unwanted pregnancies, promiscuity, sexually transmitted disease, objectification of our bodies by mass media and the entertainment industry as instruments of pleasure, wars, genital mutilation in some countries leading to disease and death.

We seldom speak about how the stresses placed upon our wombs impact our overall health as well. Like I said, the majority of the pain a black woman will experience will come through her womb: Sexual relationships, the children we give birth to, our mothers (for we are products of their wombs), our family, our community (for as women, we are the nurturers of our community, therefore we are the mothers of our community). We speak even less about the stress of oppression heaped upon us through racism, classism and sexism impact our overall health as women.

In essence, oppression overtime causes stress. It is the stressor is not eradicated, the constant state of dis-ease and imbalance upon our *womb-maness* over time will manifest as disease. The most prevalent forms of disease we see in African American women today are diabetes, hypertension, breast cancer, stroke, cervical cancer and fibroids.

Although we are in a constant struggle against the oppressive systematic stresses that impact our health, we can make choices ... we have the ability to “Choose Life.” Although the impact of racism is costing us our health, being aware of the problem also makes us aware of the solution. Choose Life....

OBESITY is one of the leading causes of type 2 diabetes, breast cancer and heart disease in this country among Black women. Why?

1. Bing eating.
2. Comfort foods
3. Not enough healthy alternatives in our community
4. Lack of exercise: women in high crime areas exercise less.
5. Poor nutrition; foods high in carbs, salt and fats

Results in:

1. Plaque build-up in vessels leading to HTN and CVA
2. Difficulty breathing...COPD...Asthma
3. More work on heart.
4. Disorders of the digestive tract.
5. Fibroids
6. Overweight children
7. Poor tolerance for activities.
8. Increase stress on physical body as well as the mind.
9. Death

Height and Ideal Weight for A/A women:

4'10 – 129lbs	5'4 – 157lbs	5'10 – 188lbs	6'4 – 221lbs
4'11 – 133lbs	5'5 – 162lbs	5'11 – 193	
5'0 – 138lbs	5'6 – 167lbs	6'0 – 199lbs	
5'1 – 143lbs	5'7 – 172lbs	6'1 – 204lbs	
5'2 – 147lbs	5'8 – 177lbs	6'2 – 210lbs	
5'3 – 152lbs	5'9 – 182lbs	6'3 – 216	

Although studies show that the impact of racism and classism in this community as well as other urban communities have resulted in an increase in these diseases in African American women, we do not have to give in to them. We have the power to choose prevent obesity. It will not happen overnight. But we can reverse some things in our surroundings...

1. Attitude
2. Forgiveness
3. Drama
4. Make healthy food choices
5. Carrot sticks for comfort foods
6. Exercise
7. Lose weight
8. Monthly self-breast exams/mammograms
9. Monthly self vaginal exams
10. Become involved in the activities in your community.
11. Spiritual grounding; become active in the church.
12. Take charge of your blood pressure...know your numbers.
13. Control your cholesterol.
14. Track your blood sugar.
15. Don't use tobacco.
16. Access to better health care-go see your PCP not the ER for your healthcare and preventive needs.
17. Education on our health
18. Become a health advocate for yourself and other women of color.

SEXUAL HEALTH

Who are you letting into your temple?

Cervical Cancer
HPV – Immunization
PAP TEST every 1-3 years
Ovarian Cancer
Multiple abortions
Multiple sexual partners
Early sexual activity
Teen pregnancy – Baby Think it Over Project

HIV/AIDS

Abstinence is sometimes best for Godliness
But sex may be necessary for your sanity...therefore protect yourself.

How do we combat Cumulative Lifetime Stress?

Project De-Stress: Conversations at Tabitha's Table

Women's gathering
Conversation/fellowship
Quilting or other hobbies
Diet/Exercise Program
Health and Wellness Programs
Cancer Support Group
Recovery Coaches
Prayer intercessors
Wounded Healers
Jewel Ministry
Counseling and Consoling as needed

APPENDIX C
Curriculum Draft: Conversations at Tabitha's Table Quilting Circle

Session #	Topic	Scripture	Quilting skill	Discussion	Voice of Tabitha	Creative Reading
1 Relaxation techniques	Introduction to the project	Acts 9:36-43	Supplies you will need: 1 yd. of fabric; any scrapes, scissors, beads or broken jewelry; journal, pen,	Ace Surveys; consents	Min. Pam	
1	"In the beginning God Created..."	Genesis 1 & 2	Selecting the color for your background Fabric Dying	What is the color of your pain...turning it to the color of your joy! There was equality in creation.	Min. Pam	For Colored Girls who Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is enough.
2	"There must be a God Somewhere"	Hebrews 11: 1-3	Recreating your World: Placing the Spirit of God on your Quilt	When the first moment in your life that you realized God Is...	Min. Faith	Shug from "the Color Purple"
3 Special Guest	Tamar's Story	Genesis 38			Mother Sara Plowden	
3 Cognitive Restructuring	Childhood Memories/ Forgiveness	Matthew 6:14 Mark 10:13-16	Continuing the story...select one item from your childhood that made you smile	What was your childhood like? Where did you grow up? Reminiscing the good and bad	Antoinette Davis	Nikki Giovanni poem, "Nikki-Rosa"
4 Support	I'm not your Superwoman ... Am I?	Matthew 2:18 Psalm 139:14 Proverbs 31	Continue the vision : How I see myself	From Boo, to lover, to wife to mother, to grandmother to friend to caregiver	Alice Blackmon	Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I Woman?" Mya Angelo, "Phenomenal Woman"

Session #	Topic	Scripture	Quilting skill	Discussion	Voice of Tabitha	Creative Reading
5	“Tell the Whole Truth “	Woman with the issue of Blood Luke 8:47	Creating a pocket for your truths and prayers	We have to pray about it and tell God the truth, it's not like God doesn't know your thoughts. Your deliverance is your utterance.	Dr. Rita	Carl Lawrence Dunbar, “The Mask We Wear;”
6	“The Women Must Gathering”	Acts 9 Luke 23:28-31	Completing your quilt	Results from the Dorcas survey; Lessons we learn	Carla Gittens	N Lynne Westfield, “Power from Deep Within.” Page 72; Intro from “The Red Tent.”
7 and 8	“Resurrection, Revelation and Celebration”	Rev. 21 Acts 9	Telling our stories thru the quilt	Reconnecting the fibers of our lives Finishing the quilt: Borders and Quilting Ace Survey and evaluation	Min. Pam	Excerpt from “For Colored Girls...” “Tabitha Arise” by Min. Pam

APPENDIX D
“Conversations at Tabitha’s Table”

(“Reconnecting the Fabrics of our Lives: Healing through the Creative Spirit”)

Facilitated by Min. Pamela D. Jones, RN, BSN, MHA, MDIV, DMIN(c)



Have you ever wondered how the Spirit can move you to create a change in your world, one tiny stitch at a time? Whenever we need a change in our lives, the Holy Spirit guides us by setting our imaginations on fire to create something new, wonderful and different.

This quilting workshop will ignite the Spirit of Creativity in you through conversations, quilting and healing among Sistahs. Come join us on Saturdays July 8, 11, 18, 25 and August 1, 15, 22, and 29, 2015 from 10 am to 3 pm at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church. Contact Min. Pamela Jones at (718) 257-1300 ext. 175 for further details.

Appendix E Ace Test

Prior to your 18th birthday:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? Or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?

No If Yes, enter 1

2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?

No If Yes, enter 1

3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? Or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?

No If Yes, enter 1

4. Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? Or your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?

No If Yes, enter 1

5. Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? Or your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?

No If Yes, enter 1

6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?

No If Yes, enter 1

7. Was your mother or stepmother:

Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? Or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? Or ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?

No If Yes, enter 1

8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?

No If Yes, enter 1

9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide? No If Yes, enter 1

10. Did a household member go to prison?

No If Yes, enter 1

Now add up your "Yes" answers: this is your ACE Score

Appendix F

Holmes-Rahe

The Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory

The Social Readjustment Rating Scale

INSTRUCTIONS: Mark down the point value of each of these life events that has happened to you during the previous year. Total these associated points.

Life Event	Mean Value
1. Death of spouse	100
2. Divorce	73
3. Marital Separation from mate	65
4. Detention in jail or other institution	63
5. Death of a close family member	63
6. Major personal injury or illness	53
7. Marriage	50
8. Being fired at work	47
9. Marital reconciliation with mate	45
10. Retirement from work	45
11. Major change in the health or behavior of a family member	44
12. Pregnancy	40
13. Sexual Difficulties	39
14. Gaining a new family member (i.e.. birth, adoption, older adult moving in, etc)	39
15. Major business readjustment	39
16. Major change in financial state (i.e.. a lot worse or better off than usual)	38
17. Death of a close friend	37
18. Changing to a different line of work	36
19. Major change in the number of arguments w/spouse (i.e.. either a lot more or a lot less than usual regarding child rearing, personal habits, etc.)	35
20. Taking on a mortgage (for home, business, etc..)	31
21. Foreclosure on a mortgage or loan	30
22. Major change in responsibilities at work (i.e. promotion, demotion, etc.)	29
23. Son or daughter leaving home (marriage, attending college, joined mil.)	29
24. In-law troubles	29
25. Outstanding personal achievement	28
26. Spouse beginning or ceasing work outside the home	26
27. Beginning or ceasing formal schooling	26
28. Major change in living condition (new home, remodeling, deterioration of neighborhood or home etc.)	25
29. Revision of personal habits (dress manners, associations, quitting smoking)	24
30. Troubles with the boss	23
31. Major changes in working hours or conditions	20
32. Changes in residence	20
33. Changing to a new school	20
34. Major change in usual type and/or amount of recreation	19
35. Major change in church activity (i.e.. a lot more or less than usual)	19
36. Major change in social activities (clubs, movies,visiting, etc.)	18
37. Taking on a loan (car, tv,freezer,etc)	17
38. Major change in sleeping habits (a lot more or a lot less than usual)	16
39. Major change in number of family get-togethers ("")	15
40. Major change in eating habits (a lot more or less food intake, or very different meal hours or surroundings)	15
41. Vacation	13
42. Major holidays	12
43. Minor violations of the law (traffic tickets, jaywalking, disturbing the peace, etc)	11

Now, add up all the points you have to find your score.

150pts or less means a relatively low amount of life change and a low susceptibility to stress-induced health breakdown.

150 to 300 pts implies about a 50% chance of a major health breakdown in the next 2 years.

300pts or more raises the odds to about 80%, according to the Holmes-Rahe statistical prediction model.

Appendix G

Tabitha's Table Evaluation

I thank you for participating in this workshop. It was my intention through the Power of the Holy Spirit to share how using ones creative energy constructively can aid in de-stressing so many of us Sistahs of color who suffer from Cumulative Lifetime Stress disorders, whether we are aware of it or not. The quilt was only a means to get us to an end. The truth is, by using creative processes you can make it through any stressor in your life. That is what our Ancestors did, and that is what we too must do. For we are the women that carry on our legacy of resilience, hospitality, keepers of wisdom and culture, and the healers of our people. God has given us the power and our creativity knows no boundaries. Each obstacle we are faced with is another opportunity to use our creative power. It is a step toward our greatness. (Eryka Badu, Essence 8/2015)

1. Was this workshop beneficial to bringing out the creative Spirit in you?

2. How can you apply the “conversations” in your everyday life?

3. How has the creative and spiritual process been beneficial to you?

4. How can you apply them to working through and alleviating the stress in your life?

5. Did this workshop help release stress and tension in you, even if for the four hours we met each week?

6. Was this form of biblical engagement relevant for you?

7. Will you be interested in continuing for another session?

8. Was the use of African American Literature appropriate for this workshop?

9. Do you feel this gathering of the Sistah-hood brought you closer to the women in your group?

10. How can this workshop be improved?

11. Are you interested in becoming a facilitator or “Tabitha” in our next session? If so, what do you think you have to offer that can teach a sistah to de-stress herself?

Take a good long look at your quilt, or as far as you have gotten and tell the story behind it. Please write at least a page.

Thank you,

Min. Pamela D. Jones

Appendix H
“We Wear the Mask”

“We Wear the Mask”

Paul Laurence Dunbar, 1872 – 1906

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
 This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile
 And mouth with myriad subtleties,

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
 Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

We smile, but oh great Christ, our cries
 To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
 Beneath our feet, and long the mile,
But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask!¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Paul Lawrence Dunbar, “We wear the Mask,” <http://www.poet.org/poetsorg/poem/we-wear-mask> (accessed January 18, 2016).

Appendix I Doing the IT

“And on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the wedding. And when the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do IT.” Now there were six stone water pots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. Jesus said to them, “Fill the water post with water.” And they filled them to the brim. And he said to them, “Draw some out now, and take it to the headwaiter.” And they took it to him. And when the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from, (but the servants who had drawn the water knew)...” (John 2:1-11).

Pray/Song: Don't do it without me

We are in the countdown for a new year. If you haven't already started, you will soon be resolving what it is you plan to do 2015. What changes will you make in your life, that will bring you closer to whatever goal you have established for yourself. But the funny thing is, these new resolutions will be the same ones we made last year and the years before. We make a resolution and for whatever reason, we don't do IT. Lord only knows why we never carry out the IT...so this year u need to whatever it is you need to do, whatever resolution that of God has given to you to resolve, DO IT.

You see often we ask God to help us out or thru a situation. We ask God to enlarge our territory. We cry out, pray, beg and plead with God to move in our live. We are waiting for a miracle to fall out of the sky. But we serve a God of action not just words. God knows that whatever we need to make it through any situation. We don't have to cry about it, beg or plead for it ... all we have to do is listen to the voice of God, and whatever He says, DO IT.

In the narrative form the Gospel of John, we see that there is a wedding in Cana, a town in Galilee. The guest list includes Mary, the mother of Jesus, Jesus and his new disciples, which according to the chronology of the text would include Andrew, Peter, Phillip, Nathanael and possibly John. There were probably many more invited guest and a host of party crashers who just showed up. Usually, we RSVP for weddings so the

family of the couple will know how much food and drink to prepare for the guest. Weddings, during those days lasted for seven days or more. During this time there was rejoicing, eating and much drinking....and running out of wine would be a great embarrassment to the family because just like today, when the wine is gone, the party is over.

We do not know how Mary found out that there was no more wine. But I have learned from experience, that if you are at a wedding with a drinking crowd, somebody better be watching the liquor and be prepared to make a run to restock.

Well maybe this was Mary's job...because she was aware of this deficit and since the process of obtaining wine was not as simple as running to the local beer and wine store, she took the problem to Jesus. Mary, in essence, acts as the catalyst for the miracle by simply telling Jesus there is a lack. She knew who Jesus was, and what he was able to do, after all she was his mother and had lived with him for 30 years. We, like Mary are sometimes called to act as a facilitator for some else's miracle --- it's not always just about us.

Mary did not beg or plead with him. She stated what the need was and walked away knowing that whatever she asked, Jesus was going to handle it. She just said to the servants, "Whatever He says, Do IT."

Now even though this is a narrative about the first miracle Jesus performs... (Some use it as a reason why the bible says it's okay to drink), some theological scholars state that within the miracle stories in the Gospels to point to something else. They are used to deliver a message only to those who have ears to hear. In this narrative we find a miracle unfolding that gives us a modern day parable.

What you talking about preacher?

Well let's take a look at it...you have a wedding that takes place on the 3rd day after Jesus has been preaching in the area. Wedding... a new relationship, a new beginning, a new life, and New Year in the life of two individuals...weddings symbolically represent the union between God and humanity...A new beginning...a new life and a new year with God. The celebration takes place in the city of Cana, the City of

Reeds...it brings us to the story of Moses, who was hidden in the reeds and drawn out of the water....letting us know that this miracle will be drawn out of the water. Jesus states that his time had not yet come....this lets us know there will be a showing of the glory of God in time.

If we dig a little deeper into the text, Jesus tells the servants to fill the water pots with water. But these were no ordinary water posts. They were the water pots that were consecrated or set aside for the ritual of purification. You see, according to Jewish hospitality, when a guest enters your home, they first must wash their hands and feet, removing any dust, dirt, or debris they might have picked up during their travels. It also is a spiritual ritual in that all prior evil or wrong doing the guest has done is removed. This is some dirty water in these pots. The text does not tell us whether the pots were empty or contained anything, but in my prophetic imagination, knowing there were many guest, there for a number of days, it is alright to assume that the pots were not empty. They contained water mixed with the residue of dust, dirt, debris and spiritual mess.

The filled these pots to the brim, brim in the Greek being “An-o” meaning a higher level, the heavenly realm, letting us know that a miracle, a union between heaven and earth is about to take place. Jesus took this unclean water; had the servants mix in clean water and blam!!! They had the best wine anyone had ever tasted...in abundance...6 pots, 20-30 gallons each....that's over 120 gallons of wine!

When you take your problems to the Master, He will use whatever resources you have on hand, mix it with your mess, your dirt, the dust from the skeletons in your closet, and He will handle IT....But your miracle may not just fall out of the sky...you may be required to do something...so whatever God tells you to do, just do IT.

It is interesting how Mary instinctively knew to go to the lowest persons in the wedding feast to assist Jesus...the servants. She by passed everyone in a position of power to act, the family, the groom the headwaiter and the guest. Why? Because Jesus can produce a miracle from the bottom. From those we consider the lowliest of people, servants or slaves....miracles can happen.

My Sistahs and brothers, we are all servants of God. Jesus is going to come to us first to see to the needs of others. We are commanded as followers of Christ to look out for the needs of God's people. The ones who are poor, marginalized, and suffering. The castrated, miss-educated, segregated, integrated, and legislated by the constipated...to those who have been lied to, denied to, vampire-ied to. To those who live in terror and oppression. Those who seek jobs, suitable and affordable housing, good healthcare, an excellent education. We are the ones called to put an end to the violence in our streets. We are called to put an end to the police brutality that plagues the Black Community. We are responsible for serving the people with the Good News of the Gospels. We must bring the people hope. We cannot tolerate injustices and degradation against any of the people God has called us to serve. And whatever God tells you to do, for the good of God's people...DO IT!

But sometimes, in our human condition we don't want to do what the IT is. The IT may require us to work. The IT may take us out of our comfort zone. The IT may not be practical for us, too time consuming. That IT may be just what is stopping you from receiving what God has in store for you or through you for the good of others. Because we don't want to do the IT...we don't want to mix the water with the mess and do whatever IT takes to get to our resolution. But you have everything within your being to succeed in whatever IT is.

NOW IS THE TIME FOR YOU TO CLAIM THE VICTORY OVER YOU IT!
BECAUSE ON THAT HILL CALLED CALVERY...THEY HUNG HIM HIGH AND STRETCHED HIM WIDE, HE HUNG HIS HEAD BUT BEFORE HE DIED, HE SAID "IT IS FINISHED!" JESUS CLAIMED THE VICTORY OVER OUR IT...BUT THAT'S NOT HOW THE STORY ENDS, BECAUSE 3 DAYS LATER HE ROSE AGAIN...WHAT EVER YOUR IT IS – IT IS ALREADY DONE --- ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS JUST DO IT!

If you need to go back to school to finish getting that degree – just do it.

If you need to quit smoking, it may take a few tries, but just do it.

The doctor told you that you've got high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, whatever...you need to change your diet...you need to lose weight.... Your already know what to do....push back from the table, put down the Pepsi and lays potato chips and just do it!

If you know you got too much drama in your life, you need to cut some folks food, find an new crowd, or just take a break and let it be just you and the Lord...just do it!

In 2015, we have to recognize that we have the power to claim the victory over our IT...it is time to start doing the IT. If you messed up in 2014, resolve that 2015 will be better...take all of the dirt, the mess and the negativity from 2014 to Jesus and whatever He tells you...DO IT...if in 2015 you want to aim higher, run the race faster, and reach new levels, stop hesitating, stop procrastinating, and just do it!!! Whatever God says to you...DO IT!!!

Appendix J Restoring

RESTORING OUR MEN, REAFFIRMING OUR WOMEN AND RESSURECTING OUR CHILDREN: THE FORMULA FOR REBUILING THE BLACK FAMILY

By Minister Pamela D. Jones

Thesis: Restoring Our Men, Affirming our Women leads to the resurrection of our Children and rebuilding of the Black family structure.

Antithesis: Failure to restore our men, by not affirming our women is leading to the physical and spiritual death of our children and the further decline of the Black family and community.

Luke 8:26-27 reads, “They sailed to the region of Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.

Luke 8:40-44 reads, “Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. Then a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus’ feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.

As Jesus was on his way, the crowd almost crushed him. And a woman was there Who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.”

Luke 8:49 reads, “While Jesus was still speaking to her, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “Your daughter is dead,” he said. “Do not bother the teacher anymore.”

The title of this sermon is: **Restoring our Men, Reaffirming our Women, Resurrecting our Children: the Formula for Rebuilding of the Black Family**

The Black Family is in a state of disarray. We are in a mess. While we only make up 17% of the population in the United States of America, our men make up 70% of the men incarcerated in prison. Over 70% of our households are made up of single female head of households. Our children make up 9.6% annual high school drop outs. If you haven't noticed, marriages within communities of color are few and far between, in

comparison to the birthrate of African American babies born to teen and unwed mothers. The generational curse of dysfunction within the black family structure continues to be perpetuated not only vertically from one generation to the next but is spreading horizontally across our communities.

There was a time we as a community looked out for one another; in good times and especially during the bad we cared for one another, looked after the children, corrected them when they were not doing the right thing and were respected by them for doing so. However, it is sad to say, but to try to correct another one's child may cause you to be cursed out. People live on the same block, some in the same buildings, and attend the same churches and do not know one another. If we do not put into effect a plan of restoration, reaffirmation and resurrection our families and our community are facing the demons of irresponsibility, mental bondage, severe anemia from the continued drain of our life forces and worst of all the physical and spiritual death of our people.

But I am here to tell you today beloved, Jesus provides us with a solution to this situation. In the Gospel of Luke 8, Jesus gives us a three point formula for rebuilding the Black family: Restore our men; reaffirm the women; and resurrection of the children. This is the formula for rebuilding our families and community.

Let me prove my point...Now take a walk with me if you will through the passage of subject. Jesus has just gotten off the boat, after calming a storm while sailing across the Sea of Galilee. The first person he encounters is a man possessed by demons. The Gospel states, he had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.

When you take a walk through the hood, no I am not talking about the newly gentrified sections of Bedford-Stuyvesant, which have been renamed Tomar and

Brooklyn Heights, I am talking about the hood, where you encounter the drug dealers, the addicts, the hustlers, with their pants hanging low, cat calling at the women, hanging out late nights, like they don't have a home to go to, and if they do, it is either momma's house, staying with their sister, or some woman that took them in cause she wants a man, but taking little responsibility for the maintenance of that household. He got a few kids out there, ain't taking care of them, just looking for his next hustle...smoking blunts with the boys...not in school, not really trying to work...they are just out there, blaming everyone else for their problems.

Eventually, if they haven't been there already, they may join the ranks of our men who end up incarcerated. You can point them in the direction of free educational programs, federal monies for college, job training programs, you name it. But they won't do it...why? Because they are living among the dead, stuck in the tombs of their mind. Many of them know about God; some can tell you about Jesus, but refuse to do what is right and follow the His teachings because they have given up hope. They continue to exist, mentally shackled hand and foot and kept under constant surveillance by the NYPD and remaining just another statistic of the failure of our people to be socially responsible and conscious of what is going on in our families, community and prepared to take action against injustices that continuously plague us.

Now, follow with me in the text, Jesus asked the man, "What is your name?" In order for Jesus to rid you of a demon, he has to know what demon he is dealing with. The man replied, "Legion," because many demons possessed him. A legion was the largest unit in the Roman army, which brought fear, oppression and devastation to the subjected people in Roman controlled territories. My people, we have our own legion...it's called

internalized oppression cause by the enslavement of our ancestors in this country based on an archaic, oppressive, capitalistic, patriarchal structure that continues to discriminate against us called... racism. It is further perpetuated by placing monetary value on our earning potential call classism. These demons go even further to discriminate against women, homosexuals, the young and the elderly through sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, and ageism respectively. It has caused us to remain stuck in our oppression and enslavement mentally because we cannot live in this society as equals to those who pride themselves as members of the status quo. We receive the leftovers and forced handouts by the government. People of color are on the bottom of government programs for education, health care, housing, and employment.

While there are still a few programs things out there to bring our men out of their demonized status, (pause) navigating the system for our Black men is not easy. Our boys maintain the highest average of children in special education, wrongly diagnosed with behavioral disorders, and generally placed in these classes because the public school system does not want to demand teachers to provide a learning environment that challenges their gift of imagination, creativity and activity. They are miss-educated, discouraged, disillusioned and suspended or expelled to the point that they give up and seek other means to make it in this world. Often times, this pushes them into a life of crime and failure to take responsibility. They get pushed into the Abyss, that place the demons did not want to go. They get pushed into a place of where all evil goes; I guess today we would call it JAIL. Prisons are being built based on the preschool admission rates of African American boys. They are preparing in advance of the possession of our

men by the demonic forces of racism, classism, unemployment, poor education, miss-education, irresponsible parenting, drug use, abuse, distribution, and violence.

Rather than go to the abyss, the demons opted with Jesus permission to go into a herd of pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. The demons, like our young men are opting for death rather than go to prison...whether it is of the mind, body or spirit, they are opting for death. There's a line in a song by Bounty Killer, that goes, "I've made up my mind, to end up in the morgue for I'd rather die cause man live like dogs...Look into my eyes tell me what you see, can you fill my pain, am I your enemy?" Oh, I feel your pain Black man...it pains me to hear too many of our young men say they are not afraid to die rather than live and be treated like the demon, society's enemy or a dirty beast. But our men are not demons nor are they the enemy; they need to be liberated from the legion of demonic forces that are attacking them.

We as a people need to be liberated from the injustices that plague our society. We have to be proactive about freeing ourselves from racism, sexism, and classism, gentrification which is displacing us out of our communities, substandard housing and education, inadequate access to health care, substance abuse, violence and murder.

Now the text states, when those tending to the pigs saw what had happened, they told everyone in town and the people came out to see what had happened...and the found the man, sitting at Jesus' feet clothed and in his right mind. But the people did not rejoice over this, their concern was not that the man had been restored, they were mad because they lost their source of income. They were more focused on the money than the man. Church, we cannot afford to value financial gain over the needs of the people. We have to be responsible for treating the people's needs as Holy. Most of the injustice and

oppression of this world is the direct result of some individual's or company's urge to get rich. People are continually being sacrificed to the god of money. We are being priced out of our community because of money. Our sons and daughters are being locked up in prisons that are profit driven, even when there are more practical and acceptable alternatives to incarceration. The church has to be a source of outreach and provide counselling and access to ideas and opportunities that will begin to restore hope in our men, restore hope in our people that will give them the peace, freedom and liberties that God wants for our lives. By following the teachings of Christ, we must have concern for and led to action in the care for the poor, the down hearted, our brothers and sisters in need. We through the power of the Holy Spirit, should be the first responder in restoring them to their right mind.

The point of resolution is in verse 38-39, when Jesus is about to leave, the man wants to go with him. Jesus tells him to, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." Once Jesus has restored your mind, body and soul, Black man...go home! Your family needs you... Your restoration is not complete until you take your place of responsibility to and for your family! It may take some work on your part to get back in the door, because once burnt, Sistahs are skeptical, but keep coming back, letting them see God working in you. Work on building yourself up in the faith. For you are not in a battle against flesh and blood, but against powers and principalities, and all sorts of spiritual wickedness in high and low places... You have to put on the whole armor of God! (Emphasis here) Pull up your pants, put on the strong belt of truth. Enroll in school and graduate. Put on the shirt and tie of righteousness; Get a good job, or start your own business. Turn your hat around into the helmet of salvation and give back to your

community. Drop the guns and pick up the Sword which is the Word of God! Show and prove to them just how good God is!

Now the second ingredient in the formula...When Jesus returns to Galilee, Jarius, one of the synagogue rulers, fell at his feet begging him to come and heal his dying daughter. He is surrounded by a large crowd. Now here comes this woman, who has been hemorrhaging for 12 years. Under Levitical law, this woman was unclean and therefore an outcast. Imaging the abuse she must have suffered. Who was she? Was she someone's wife, daughter or mother? The Scriptures talk of a physical bleeding, the cause is unknown...it could have been an irregular menstrual cycle, fibroids, endometriosis, or complications after childbirth, emotional stress or trauma. Today, many of us sisters are suffering from severe anemia not so much from the physical but from us spiritually bleeding out. We are hemorrhaging from issues with our relationships. As women, most of our hurt and pains in life come as a result of issues of our wombs. What do you mean by that preacher? Our wombs are a gateway for love. It is where we receive our men and bring forth our children. If you ask any woman what hurts her the most, it is usually a bleeding relationship between one of the two. We are creatures of relationships. Good relationships affirm us, while bad relationships drain us of our life force. We will talk to and get advice from other women who are bleeding just as bad as we are...but sister, if you really want healing take it to Jesus, reach out in faith and touch the hem of his garment, do not be afraid to give it over to the God...The scripture states, "Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering." The minute you turn your issue of spiritual drain over to Jesus, I mean really turn it over to him, you are freed from your suffering. But preacher, I did that and it didn't work...well

maybe it didn't work because you left out the key point that you must do. For the scripture states clearly, that she fell at his feet and told him the WHOLE TRUTH. Sisters, Jesus can affirm you, but you have got to reaffirm yourself...we have to be honest with ourselves, what role are you playing in your hemorrhaging?

The word WHOLE, leaves nothing out.

Whole truth means not repeating what somebody else told us to say, or what sounds good, leaving out your own voice.

Whole truth – means the need for oneness of our body, mind and soul, oneness in our relationships, telling of our helplessness, powerlessness, our great pain and being real about how we got there.

Whole truth – means putting yourselves back together, not allowing yourself to be split apart by your history, by a man, a child or another woman, or a world that is systematically designed to oppress and depress you.

Whole truth - means reclaiming your body as good. You are a child of God, Made in God's image and likeness. Your body is the temple of God. We are the gateway that brings for life into this world. You can't just let any and every man enter into your temple.

Whole truth – means confronting issues of sexist attitudes and issues head-on as well as other institutional sins, like racism, war, poverty, and the structures that perpetuate them.

Whole truth means that it is time for honesty and mutuality in human relationships – no more games.

The WHOLE TRUTH is that you are entitled as a child of God to a full and fruitful human experience, free from oppression, for Jesus has affirm you as a daughter of God, you have been affirmed and set free from any obstacle that has been thrown at you. Now it is time to reaffirm this for yourself.

It is by faith that Jesus affirms our healing. When we take our problems, our drama, our messed up relationships that we need to leave alone any way, that daughter who just won't do right, that son that keeps hanging with the wrong crowd, that boss who won't get off your back and keeps putting more responsibilities on you, when you drop down at the Master's feet ...and tell the WHOLE truth, not to Jesus, because He already knows the truth...God knows you inside and out, your comings and your goings...You have got to tell the whole truth to yourself...Jesus already knows your truth, but you have to reaffirm the truth! When you admit the whole truth to yourself then your healing can be complete. Let the whole truth be heard, be healed, and then and only then can you go on to heal others, because Jesus says, greater works than this shall you do...it is time for the sisters to heal so we can start to heal our families, and our communities.

Now that we have the restored man, the reaffirmed woman, now let's look at the final point, the resurrection of our children.

As the story goes, while Jesus is still talking to the woman, a messenger comes from Jairus' house telling him that his daughter is dead...not bother Jesus any more ...it is too late. Jesus tells Jairus, "don't be scared, just believe, she will be healed." Verse 37 states, "He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John, the brother of James." When Jesus arrives at Jairus' home, folks are weeping and wailing all over the place. Jesus ask them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead, only

sleeping.” Jesus puts everybody out except for the child’s father and mother and the disciples he took with him. He goes to where the child is and takes her by the hand and says, “*Talitha koum!*” (Which means little girl, get up!) Immediately the girl stood up and walked around...then he gives strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and (this is the key point) told them to give her something to eat.

When fall on our knees asking Jesus to heal our dying children, just like Jesus, we have to ignore what others are saying about our children and accepting what they are telling us as the absolute truth. We have to actively uplift them. Our children are intelligent, it is up to us to do just as Jesus says, and not be afraid of the statistics about the probability that 1 in 6 male children will be incarcerated, that 1 in 10 teenage girls will become pregnant, become victims of violence or drug addiction. We just have to believe...we have to believe in the fact that more black males are enrolling in college than those occupying jails. We have to believe that our girls are worth investing in, and not allowing them to fall prey to the pimps and pushers that are looking to snatch them away from us. When we bring children to Christ, we have to remember, they are not dead...they are only sleeping. They have been lulled to sleep by mass media that glorifies sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, dope dealing, and passing the Covacia. They have been lured into the lifestyle of the streets, the bling, the false glamour and glitter. We have to do just as he does in verse 37...don’t let anyone around them except those who can help and be positive role models for them.

Too often, we allow the wrong people to be an influence on our children... Just the other day I was on the bus and a little girl who could not be any older than 5 was singing “Drunken Love” and imitating Beyoncé’s dance moves... While on subway, I just

heard a white woman teaching her child the words to “We Shall Overcome.” Just look on Face Book at the videos of our babies’ twerking, fighting, and cursing. Somebody is recording that, thinking it’s cute. Who are we letting our children be influenced by...sometimes we don’t even have a clue. If we as parents are broken, what kind of image are we to our children? A lot of what our children are doing is a result of what we are exposing them to. What are we feeding our children? It is not only the fast foods that we pick up because we are too busy to cook, but our failure to provide them with spiritual food, teachings about our true history, faith and culture that is causing their demise. We are as Christian parents are responsible to teach them the Way, the Truth and the Light. We have to be proactive in their education, teaching them about their faith and religious truths, teach them who they really are...THEY ARE CHILDREN OF THE MOST HIGH GOD...THEY ARE OUR FUTURE!!!

Jesus is giving the formula for saving our families: Restoring our men, reaffirming us as women, and resurrecting our children by giving them spiritual food to eat. All we have to do is come to the feet of Jesus and follow these three steps:

1. Brothers once you have been restored, go home and take responsibility for your family.
2. Sisters, stop the bleeding, tell the whole truth and have faith, for you are a daughter of God, you can let go of all the drama and live in peace.
3. As for our children, watch who you let around them and influence them. Give them not only nutritional food that is good for their bodies but spiritual food to nurture their souls. Through restoration, reaffirmation, we will see a resurrection within ourselves, our families and our community.

Appendix K
Sing Me an Old Fashioned Love Song
By Min. Pamela D. Jones

*I am black and beautiful,
O daughters of Jerusalem.
Like the tents of Kedar,
Like the curtains of Solomon.
Do not gaze at me because I am dark,
Because the sun has gazed on me.
My mother's sons were angry with me;
They made me keeper of the vineyards;
But my own vineyard I have not kept.”*

Song of Songs 1:5-6

In Alice Walker's The Color Purple, the character Shug Avery makes a very profound and prophetic statement. She says, "I think God gets angry when we walk past a field of the color purple and don't take notice of it." For centuries, my beloveds, we have been walking past fields of purple and calling it a batch of weeds. Because there is a great probability that there is not one of you who have not been preached to about sex being a sin in some shape, form or fashion.

Yes that deadly sin of the flesh which is referred to as fornication, if done without the benefit of marriage; adultery or infidelity if done outside the sanctity of marriage; and lust if thought about too often with or without marriage. However, I submit to you today, that God is angry with us for misconstruing her beautiful gift to humankind as a fleshly sin. Focusing on sex only as sin has led some of us to walk around mean, evil and uptight, living a life of hell and damnation right here on earth.

God is love. Our sexuality is a gift of that love. Two individuals physically joining together as one is the most intimate of all human expressions. There is an exquisiteness in the sensual union. It's like a melody in a song, so sweetly sang from one soul touching another.

The Song of Songs speaks to just that. It is a poem that is free of the manmade idiosyncrasies about sex and is liberating to us as women in that this is the only place in the Biblical text that a woman is uninhibited about expressing her love for a man. I'm talking unrepressed, undenied, and unrestrained LOVE: the freedom to give and receive all the erotic pleasures GOD has placed in our being. The kind of love that makes your toes curl, makes you giggle, and leaves you daydreaming about that night. Or singing a Good Old Fashioned Love Song.

In the superlative sense this the best of all songs. Though the authorship has been attributed to King Solomon, the writer is really unknown. The characters of the song are: the woman, or beloved, identified in the text as a Shunammite; the man, her lover; and the Daughters of Jerusalem, her friends, chorus or Doo-Wop section. Because of its blatant and erotically sexual nature, the ancient Jews and Christians have rejected its literal interpretations and allegorized it. For the Jews it represented God's dealings with God's bride, Israel. For Christians it referred to the relationship between Jesus and the Church. However, if we look at what is written in the text, it clearly is about the love affair between a woman and her man.

It's just a good old fashioned love song - the greatest love song ever written because it is the foundation for which every love song ever made has ascended from.

We try to vilify desires of the heart by calling them fleshly desires. But are we not made of flesh? Is it wrong for us, whom God has created to exist in relationship to desire the touch of another? To want to feel the kisses of your lover's lips and take delight in it? To remember the scent of his oil left behind on your skin after his embrace? Or recalling *the very first time you made love.*

The woman is anxiously awaiting the arrival of her lover with anticipation, daydreaming everything about him. Dig if you will the picture of you and I engaged in a kiss; the sweat of your body covers me, can my darling, can you picture this...

She says, "Let the king bring me into his chamber...for your love is king, crown me with your heart, your love is king, you're the ruler of my heart.

There is joy in her anticipation...as she replays her last encounter over and over in her head, knowing *that it's never as good as the first time.*

What troubled me about this passage was the woman makes mention of the color of her skin, darkened by the sun. She has been negligent in caring for her own vineyards because her mother's sons were angry with her and forced her to care for theirs instead...*what's love got to do with this?*

This woman, Black am I, but beautiful!" darkened by the rays of the sun forced to work in the fields of her mother's sons. Mother, also meaning a nation. The sons of that nation, though they are of the same mother, thou maybe not of the same father. Angry with her – due to jealousy or actually knowing her worth, as a strong Black and beautiful woman. Neglecting her own vineyard - her body - her personhood - her femininity – her sexuality- her strength - her love - her best fruits.

When a vineyard is neglected it becomes overrun with weeds, engulfed by thorns and thickets, the vines get choked off and dies. Was this woman, this Shunammite woman, not to have satisfaction in the fruits of her own vine?

It screams out to me the history that we as Black women have faced in this land, heaped upon us by those that brought us to the shores of these United States. Forced to work in the fields of this land to build the wealth of our enslavers. Beaten down and objectified as a brood sow, only good for labor, wet nurses and breeding. To be raped and abused by the drunken, lustful, sexual immorality by the oppressor. Did our foremothers not deserve a lover who would one day come to them and say, “Arise, my darling beautiful one and come with me?”

Even after our emancipation, the Black woman still remained in the margins of society. From Jim Crow, segregation to the Civil Rights Movement, Black women denied their own rights as women to stand in support of our men, ignoring the need to tend our own vineyard.

We became caught in a web of triple jeopardy: Racism, sexism and classism; taking on the caricatures’ of a Jezebel, Mammy, Sapphire, a vixen, either sexually promiscuous or void of feminine grace and charm.

As women, we are taught to shun sex, avoid an admirer’s gaze, and to believe that sexual intimacy, femininity, womanhood, and black skin, were not gifts from the divine but a curse that inherited from our foremother, Eve. Our desire was to please our husbands, and not seem to find too much sexual gratification for ourselves. Deuteronomic laws were thrown in our faces about remaining a virgin until marriage, while a man can enjoy sowing the wild oats of his youth.

Paul lists fornicators among those who will not enter into the kingdom of God. Women are to be obedient, passive, following their husbands' orders. We are to service them sexually for a man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. But Paul, did you read this love poem?

This poem, this Song of Songs, lets us know, that it's alright to find joy in our sexuality. It is a poem of liberation and sexual freedom! According to Angela Davis, "dismantling the double standard with respect to women's right to engage in and enjoy sex is one of the prerequisites for women's social emancipation."

The Shunammite woman is letting us know it is alright to proclaim our love and seek pleasure in it. And at the end of the end of the day, as 4:16 states we can look forward to our beloveds. Like an apple tree in the forest, delighting to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. He can take me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love. Strengthen me with raisins; refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embracing me.

Oh daughters of Jerusalem – don't send me no doctor, to fill me up with all of those pills, I got me a man named Dr. Feel good, to take care of all of my ills.

I don't know what else to tell you, it's all right here in the Bible...it's a wonderful thing to be in love, to express love, sexually, freely, to let *that fire and desire burn deep within your soul*. Yes I want you to rub my feet, *kiss me from head to toe, down my back and onto my navel, cause baby, you are singing to me a good old fashioned love song*.

Amen

Appendix L
People Pleasing
By Min. Pamela D. Jones

Acts 12: 1-11 -NIV

“It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrist.

Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the Iron Gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”

Improvisation here re: 2015 resolutions

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you must do something you really do not want to do? Say something you really may not want to say? All to please somebody that you really do not like, for the sake of your people? Are you a people pleaser?

This was the situation that old King Herod is in. He has executed James, John's brother and because the Jews were loving him for this. When he sees that this pleased the Jews, he decides to arrest Peter and planned to execute him after Passover. Herod is all caught up in people pleasing. So strong was his intentions to please the people, he place 4 squads of 4 solders each, that 16 soldiers to guard this one man to make sure that he would please the people and receive his glory for that day.

But before he could do this, an angel of the lord helped peter to escape. Herod would not get his praise and glory from the Jews that day. He was not going to be doing any people pleasing that day.

Herod can be a blood thirsty crazed maniac when angry, who enjoyed the authority and power that had been assigned to him by the Roman Imperial Empire. To cross Herod would certainly mean death.

However, on the flip side, Herod had to do whatever it took to keep Caesar happy. The Jesus Movement was becoming a threat to the Jewish aristocracy which was the major supporters of the temple and controllers of the money. As part of the Imperial Empire, Judea had to pay heavy taxes to Rome. And to keep Rome happy, the aristocracy giving and his pockets loaded, he had to please those who were not necessarily concerned with treating the needs of the people as holy.

Herod, who was dead set on stopping the spread of Jesus movement while he may have been pleasing people, was not pleasing God. He did not care if his actions were not pleasing to God. He was more caught up in imperial power than the power of God. His heart was not with God, so much so that if you drop down to verse 23, he was struck down by the angle of the Lord and he was eaten by worms...worms attack and kill from the inside out. Devouring our internal organs...the text says maggots, which feed on rotten meat. Herod's heart was rotten to the core.

How often, beloveds do we find ourselves in people pleasing positions? We will do anything, say anything just so that we can get whenever it is that we need for those who hold the keys of power in whatever shape form or fashion over us.

We see it in the political arena, Pres. Obama has to make all sorts of deals and concessions, just to please people.

You do it at home, to keep the peace because you were told never go to bed angry, even when you know that man is wrong, and need to get off his _____you fill in the blank....people pleasing.

You do it on your job...got to keeps the money flowing. Sure those budget cuts mean the workers will not get a cost of living raise this year but administration will be getting a big bonus for cutting the budget...people pleasing.

And we definitely do it in the church...to keep the congregation happy and keep those offerings flowing. We preach the feel good sermons...people pleasing, avoid topics that make them uncomfortable; people pleasing...keep certain folk up front and center, while pushing others who are equally gifted and talented in the far background...people pleasing.

We as the people of God, will often find ourselves on a continuum of people pleasing....either we are the pleaser or in rare cases, the one to be pleased. But whatever the case may be, the Good News of the Gospel must continue to be spread, and we have to do it. You can't always bend and bow to the will of the people...you can't bend and bow to the rule of the establishment or status quo... you may find yourself in a situation when you have to do so, but remember, God is in control and God knows what decision you have to make...God knows if your heart is full or if it is rotten and full of maggots.

But pleasing God is hard preacher... oh really? I am here to tell you, it is easier to please God than it is to please man. See man will always want more, and whatever you give will never be enough. And when you have given all that you can, they will turn their back on you.

God, on the other hand, will accept what you do to please God and when you have given all that you can, will put you in a position to do more. You see, when you please God, God will step in and fight your battles. When you please God, God will keep a roof over head, breath in your body, food on your table and clothes on your back. When you please God, will keep you clothed and in your right mind. When you please God, God will send an angel to guild you past the guards and free you from what seems like impossible situations. Imagine if in 2016 church, we all stood up and stopped pleasing man and started pleasing God- the scriptures say:

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed.”

“No weapon formed against us would prosper...because God’s more than a conqueror”

“If we trust in the Lord, and lean not on our own understanding. In all thy ways, acknowledge God and God will direct our path.”

For God said, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

“Now min eyes shall be open, and mine ears attend unto the prayer that is made in this place!”

New Jerusalem, if you want 2016 to be better than 2015, just say I quit!

- I quit beating myself up because I can’t make other people happy.
- I am going to quit ignoring the signs that say you don’t care about me and it’s time to move on.
- I quit neglecting my own household because I am too busy attending to yours.
- I quit investing in what consistently gives you a negative return.
- I quit accepting your apologies and you are not changing your behavior.
- I quit trusting in the created more than I trust in the Creator.
- I quit expecting others to do for me what I can do for myself.
- I quit making excuses and start making an effort.
- I quit allowing my past to paralyze your present.
- I quit sowing good seed in bad soil.
- Just stay in the Word, PRAY and quit people pleasing and start pleasing God.

In 2016, I QUIT!!!

Appendix M Quilt Instructions

Dying your Fabric

This was a method I learned years ago at a quilter exhibition. Dr. Rita reminded me about it and I am so glad she did because the dyed fabric dries quickly, there is very little mess, and it is rather inexpensive.

The supplies needed for this step are: White cotton fabric, acrylic paints, foam shaving cream, bowels or paper plates, spoons or anything you can use to mix the dye, water, tape, news paper, plastic garbage bags (to protect floor and furniture), paint brushes.

1. Take your white fabric square and tape it to two to three sheets of newspaper.
2. Cover any furniture that you do not want to accidentally get the dye mixture with plastic as well as the floor if carpeted.
3. Take a bowel or paper plate and spray the shaving cream on to it until you have about a 3 inch mound.
4. Now take the acrylic paint of your choice and squeeze about two table spoons into the shaving cream. .
5. With a spoon or stir, Mix the shaving cream and paint together thoroughly. The more paint you use the darker the dye will appear. However, it will dry a few shades lighter.
6. You can repeat this step using as many colors as you need to create the feeling that you want in your background.
7. Once the fabric is dry, look at the beauty of the combined colors. Press with iron set for synthetic fabrics to set the dye. Be sure to use a pressing cloth because the dye will stick to the iron if it is too hot.
8. After drying you can touch up the background with glitter or metallic paints.

Placing the Spirit of God on your Quilt

1. Take your pattern or drawing and trace over it with black marker to **make it bolder**. Be careful not to make your design bigger than the size your background fabric. Ask your Sistahs who are more artistically inclined to help you with your vision. You and also use common things found in the home to help you draw shapes like a saucer for the sun or moon. Flower patterns will be provided. Mountains and waters are just curved shapes. This will become your pattern for your landscape.
2. Next take your pattern and trace it onto paper backed fusible webbing. Roughly cut the pieces out. Do not cut them exactly to size yet.
3. Iron the paper backed fusible webbing to the fabric you will be using for each item in your landscaping. **Be careful** not to place the iron directly on the fusible webbing side...it will mess up your iron. Remember: Iron the rough side of the webbing to the wrong side of the fabric.
4. Place these items where you want them to go on your background...don't overdo it with the landscaping because there is still more that has to be added to your quilt.
5. Pin or tape the items on the place you may want it to go. Keep in mind there will be more added to the quilt so make sure not to use up all of the empty space.
6. When you are satisfied with the placement, peel the paper from the fusible webbing and fabric and press the webbing side onto your background.

Now stand back, looking at what the Creator Spirit has done through you, and praise God, and love yourself for having the courage to create because that is the gift that God has just revealed to you.

Step 3 in the Process: Finding your Peace in Forgiveness of your Past

Think about something from your childhood that gave you peace and comfort. It would be nice if you still have it in your possession. Could it have been a nickname, words to a song you sang, a picture, a game, or a TV show? It can be a photograph.

You can easily transfer a picture onto fabric with a laser jet printer that scans.

1. Take your photograph and scan it into your computer, you may need to reduce the size.
2. Take a piece of white cotton fabric and lightly apply stick adhesive to a plain sheet of paper, 8 1/2 by 10 and lay fabric over it. Allow to dry.
3. Place fabric sheet in paper feeder and copy the picture onto the fabric.
4. Trim away the excess fabric.
5. Figure out a way to creatively add this to your quilt.

Creating an Image of Yourself as God sees you

Draw a picture of yourself in the *Imago Dei*, the image and likeness of GOD. Focus on the image of yourself as GOD, not human, wants to see you. Then using the same process we used for placing our flowers on our quilts, do the same with yourself. Images and silhouettes are available on line if you have difficulty drawing. Remember, you also have to put your childhood memory on your quilt, so before you press on the appliqued image, place that piece on as well. Are your beginning to see your story unfold?

The Process: Creating your pocket of Truth

1. Cut a piece of fabric six inches by five inches and fold it in half.
2. Place in a lower corner of the quilt that has nothing in it, with the folded edge facing up.
3. Fold under the edge closest to the center $\frac{1}{4}$ inch and iron flat.
4. Pin the raw edges to the corner that you place the pocket in.
5. Stitch the folded inner edge down using a decorative stitch with embroidery thread. Don't worry about sewing down the corner edges because they will be stitched up in the boarder.
6. Now take the one positive word you selected from your declaration of truth and using fabric markers, write it on your pocket.

Framing your quilt: Gathering together and reconstructing the Fibers of Your Life

Now that we have gathered together the different fabrics of our lives, let's re-examine what we have done:

1. We identified the color of our pain and turned it to the color of our joy through learning to dye our own background fabric.
2. We identified the presence of God in our lives by recognizing God's beauty in nature through a biblical flower applique.
3. We recalled childhood memories, some that hurt and some that were happy, but all were necessary for what God has called us to do in this life by adding a picture of our fondest childhood memory.

4. We addressed the question of “I ‘m not your super woman, or am I?” By creating an image of yourself in the eyes of God.
5. We told the whole truth about our innermost secrete and discovered the lesson we had to learn from it and made a pocket of truth for ourselves.

Now we are at the final phase of constructing our quilt top. We are now ready to frame or put the borders on our stories. A border is a strip or strips of fabric that frame the edges of the quilt. It is like a picture frame. Borders can be wide or narrow, pieced or appliqued, or a combination of techniques. For the sake of simplicity we will be doing a two strip border. Try to use fabrics in your border that complements your quilt rather than clashes with it or makes it look too disorganized. I guess you can say a border is like framing your life in the proper perspective.

The easiest and most common border style is the plain border shown in Figure 1.

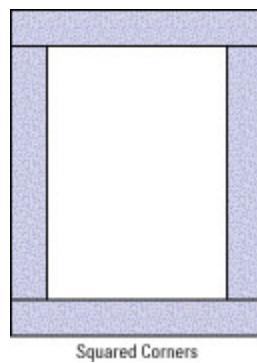


Figure 1: A plain border with squared corners.

Borders with cornerstones are simple borders with the addition of a square in the corner of each border (see Figure 2). The cornerstones can be a complementing or contrasting fabric or you can use pieced or appliqued blocks that complement the center are of your quilt.

Did You Have Any Trouble?

You're not alone if when you assembled the quilt center area, your stitching wasn't exactly perfect and your seam allowances were not quite 1/4 inch. You may even discover that the left side of your quilt center is longer than the right side of your quilt. That's okay; you can tweak it into shape by creatively cutting the borders!

Once you have sewn the top and bottom border on, measure again the length of your quilt. This is how long the next 2 borders will be by 4 1/2 inches wide. Now sew them onto your quilt.

Now get to stitching, this will be part of your homework to do in your *ME* time at home.

Quilting and Finishing your Quilt

1. Take a piece of batting and backing fabric approximately 1 1/2 inched less in the diameter of your quilt top.
2. Pin the quilt top, batting and backing together using several pins. You may also baste them together.
3. You may join the three layers together in one of two ways:
 - a. By using small stitches and shadowing each item in you quilt making sure you catch all 3 layers; or
 - b. By using yarn or embroidery thread to tie several little knots in you quilt.

Simply take the needle and go through the three layers pull the thread up and tie a knot.

4. Once you have completed your quilting, iron the excess fabric from the quilt top over the back edge of the quilt. Turn up a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch edge on the ironed over fabric, press and pin. Then slip stitch around the quilt and you are finished.
5. Embellish your quilt with beads, trinkets, words, rhinestones, or whatever will add beauty to your work of art. Then sign it with a fine tip fabric marker....beautiful!
6. Now thank the Holy Spirit and you for a job well done.

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